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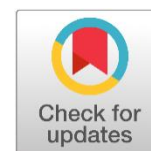
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Navigating the Digital Divide: Maternal Technoference and Its Reverberations on Children's Moral Development

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the extensive maternal social media engagement has introduced a unique intersection between their online presence and their role as caregivers, influencing their children's moral development. Mothers spending a lot of time on social media can influence their children's understanding of right and wrong. In today's digital era, the exploration of how mothers teach moral values and behaviors to their children along with the distracting social media usage is crucial. This research explores the influence of maternal social media usage on children's moral development, delving into strategies employed by mothers to shape their children's moral behavior in the context of digital distractions. Grounded in the social constructivist and interpretivist philosophical approach, the present study utilizes a qualitative case study design within cultural context of Pakistani society, involving educated housewives caring for their children aged 5 to 12 in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The findings highlight the essential role of mothers in moral development of children, with the need for mindful parenting, including religious education, positive reinforcement and meaningful interactions with children to nurture the moral growth of children.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, with the widespread use of digital devices there has been a significant transformation in

parenting practices particularly, among mothers (Nur'Aini & Minsih, 2022). The accessibility of smartphones and social media platforms has brought about opportunities and challenges that previous generations did not encounter (Braune Krickau et al., 2021). Amidst this revolution, it is crucial to acknowledge and appreciate the enduring roles that mothers play in shaping the moral development of their children. Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's morality by involving themselves in their children's lives in certain ways, i.e., being role models, instilling religious beliefs, communicating and providing bonding time (Tan & Yasin, 2020). Regarding parenting styles, the most effective parenting style is authoritative parenting in effectively encouraging children's morality (Tan & Yasin, 2020).

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However, in today's age where mothers are navigating the "Digital Divide", technology's influence on the moral development of children is noticeable. Parental problematic technology use is associated with technology-based interruptions in parent-child interactions, termed "technoference," (McDaniel & Radesky, 2017). Therefore, the main focus of this study is to explore the influence of maternal technoference on children's moral development. By delving into this relationship, the study provides deeper insights that contribute to understanding of parenting in the digital age. This study sheds light on the interplay between maternal technology use and generational moral development, adding a deeper discussion to contemporary parenting in the technological age.

To achieve this aim, the current study examines the extent of mothers' social media engagement and its implications for their children's moral development, an area that has so far received little exploration. Since, mothers have an influence on shaping their children's moral values, it is important to examine how their online presence intersects with their role as caregivers due to the distractions of social media platforms. This research paper addresses the need to comprehend how these online interactions impact children's moral development, within the societal and cultural context of Pakistan. This study seeks to explore the connection between social media usage, motherhood and the moral development of children.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the influence of maternal social media usage on children's moral development.
 - a. To explore the strategies employed by mothers to shape their children's moral behavior in the context of social media distractions.
 - b. To gain a clear understanding of mothers demonstrating positive behaviors contributes to children's moral development.

Research Question

- How does maternal Technoference affect children's moral development?

Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on two theoretical frameworks; Attachment theory and social learning theory. Attachment theory developed by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, emphasizes the importance of mother-child attachment and how disruptions in this relationship leads to maternal neglect (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Scharfe, 2017). In the digital age, the increasing presence of mothers on social media has emerged as a potential barrier to the establishment of a secure mother-child relationship. Developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, social learning theory focuses on observational learning and how social behavior contributes to a child's development (Bandura, 1977). The theory also suggests that individuals develop behaviors by mimicking other individuals in their environment (Ali et al., 2023). Current research examines how mothers' excessive use of social media can affect their children's moral development. Children imitate their mothers' behaviors and when mothers prioritize social media over quality time with their children, it affects their children's learning processes, thus highlighting the need to explore how mother's experiences with technology emphasizes the moral development of their children. The

main objective of this study is to examine how mothers balance the digital distractions of social media and instill moral values in their children.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's digital environment, the widespread use of social media has become an integral part of daily life, raising scholarly interest in its potential impact on children's development. This literature review explores the intersection of motherhood and social media use, examining existing research to illuminate the complex relationship between maternal online activities and its influence on children's moral development.

Research studies demonstrated that a mother-child bond determines the moral development of children, for instance, when there is a connection between individuals, i.e., an attachment between a mother and child, it can promote feelings of empathy, moral values and ethical behavior (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). Additionally, when mothers engage in discussions about moral principles with their children, it helps the children to understand the concepts of right and wrong and provides guidance for making better decisions (Gomes et al., 2022). Engaging in dialogues that address dilemmas while explaining concepts and strategies contributes to moral growth (Gomes et al., 2022). Additionally, observing mothers' demonstrations of behavior influences how children behave themselves (Dworazik et al., 2019). Also, cultural and contextual factors play a role in shaping the process of socialization, which in turn impacts how mothers instill moral principles (Vu et al., 2022). However, while the literature thoroughly examines these influences, the potential effects of maternal social media usage on this critical aspect are not extensively explored in the existing literature.

The development of moral values is influenced by factors, i.e., parental involvement, relationships, parenting styles and moral reasoning (Siddiqui & Habib, 2021; Esmaeili et al., 2021; Medez & Gayoles, 2021). Yoo and Smetana (2021) explored the associations among child temperament, parenting, and young children's moral and conventional understanding, highlighting the interplay between child temperament and parenting associated with the development of young children's moral understanding. Similarly, Masitah and Sitepus (2021) highlighted that the parenting model that is best used to develop children's moral values is authoritarian parenting, where this parenting balances clear and high expectations with emotional support and recognition of children's autonomy. In addition, the investigation of Hou (2023) highlighted that moral reasoning increases with age and is correlated with social interactions and to some extent it is determined by the ability of internalizing moral values of the surrounding and the moral authorities. Additionally, the term phubbing (a combination of phone and snubbing) indicates the act of ignoring someone in a social context by paying attention to the smartphone, is associated with a feeling of disconnection with parents and weakened parent-child attachment (Pancani et al., 2020).

This combination of insights aim to provide an understanding of the dynamics at play leading to a research focus on how maternal engagement with technology affects children's moral development in the digital age and thus shaping the research question.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a PhD thesis titled, "The Influence of Social Media Usage by Women on Children's Education and Socialization." The larger study aims to comprehend maternal use of social media influences their parenting styles and further its influence on their children's developmental trajectories. This encompassed aspects, i.e., maternal motivations for social media usage, mother-child attachment and the influences on children's education and socialization, with a focus on the digital engagement of housewives. However, this paper narrows its scope to address the issue of moral development in relation to maternal social media usage. To better grasp how maternal technofence influences children's moral development, this paper firmly adopts an ontological framework. This framework highlights the changing nature of reality which is shaped by interactions and experiences. It specifically focuses on how women's use of technology influences their children's moral development. The epistemological framework aligns with interpretivism and the qualitative case study methodology is used to explore the relationship between maternal technofence and children's moral development in the digital age. According to Waqar et al. (2023) qualitative research design thoroughly analyzes the findings.

Present research work employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities participant possesses (Etikan et al., 2016) was employed in the initial phase. After gaining access to the preliminary samples, snowball sampling technique was employed, where the sample begin to introduce other people to take part in the research (Sadler et al., 2010). Furthermore, the aim of employing snowball sampling method is to identify housewives who are acquainted with those initially selected using purposive sampling, as they are likely to belong to the identical socio-economic class i.e. upper middle class. This strategy substantially broadens the participation pool among educated female housewives from well-off families. Thematic Analysis is a qualitative method of organizing and describing the data by identifying underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study used Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step data analysis approach to extract themes from interview data. This involved becoming familiar with the data, identifying codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining those themes and finally interpreting them to gain insights into how maternal actions shape children's moral growth in the digital world. Through this iterative and reflexive research approach that respects participants' consent and prioritizes their privacy and confidentiality, I gained insights into the influence of maternal Technofence on children's moral development within the context of digital divide.

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

In research thematic analysis is a method that allows for an understanding of the meaning in narratives, while the discussion refers to compare and contrast the findings of a study with published literature, helping to evaluate similarities, differences and potential explanations for them (Malik et al., 2023). This paper examines the consequences of maternal technofence on children's moral development through the lens of two theories; social learning theory, which focuses on how children observe and imitate their mothers' behavior and attachment theory which recognizes

the relationship between children and caregivers. The paper discusses themes; firstly, it explores how mothers' use of social media affects children's moral development and secondly, it looks into strategies for cultivating optimistic behavior in children while addressing some of the challenges involved in this process. These valuable insights contribute to our understanding of how mothers discipline their children and the crucial role it plays in shaping their moral development.

Maternal Influence on Children's Moral Development

The research conducted by Gomes et al. (2022) underscored maternal communication with pre-school children about morality and elaborated the ways mother's communication influences the moral development of children. It highlights the importance of communication by mothers in instilling moral values in children. Similarly, Esmaeili et al. (2021) explore the connection between parenting styles and children's moral development wherein children's attachment acts as a mediator. Building upon these studies present research focuses on examining how mothers use of social media influence their role in shaping their children's moral development. By doing so, the study aims to make a unique contribution to the existing body of literature.

In today's digital age, where smartphones and social media dominate our lives, the findings from the present research underscores the collective desire of all mothers to provide their children with strong moral foundations. Thirty-two mothers who were active social media users expressed dissatisfaction with their own socialization efforts, perceiving significant gaps that they struggled to fill due to the distractions and multitasking inherent in their home environments. They perceived their children's personalities as developing naturally and believed that the younger generation paid little attention to their guidance, making teaching and managing them challenging. They held the belief that their children would acquire knowledge and experience important life lessons through their own journey, attaching less significance to formal socialization efforts.

Zoha narrated,

"I prioritize actively listening to my children, even when they approach me with seemingly nonsensical topics. Their inquisitive nature leads them to ask numerous questions, which can be disruptive to my social media use. I must admit that I occasionally feel frustrated, especially when it seems that no matter how many questions I answer, they come up with even more. This cycle can escalate our emotions, causing both of us to become angry. I have noticed that sometimes my kids resort to tactics to distract me and pretend to be hurt or ask me to spend time with them. This is a reminder that my kids crave connection and making me reassess my priorities and being involved in my digital activities. It makes me want to find balance and be fully present for them."

Sadia expressed her opinion,

"I find that my daughter is overly expressive, sometimes leading to situations where she crosses moral boundaries and embarrasses me in front of others and I feel very sad about her behavior but I struggle to find ways that help me effectively managing and dealing with it. When

reflecting on how my social media usage might interact with her expressions and communication, I realize that there have been instances when my online distractions have prevented me from giving her the guidance and boundaries she needs. This has made it challenging to help her understand the importance of respecting moral boundaries while also nurturing her expressive nature in a healthy way. It's a delicate balance that I'm continuously working on."

Further, Seher narrated,

"I strive to instill ethical values in my child, yet I don't observe the behavior I'm hoping for. Whenever my son does a lot of wrong acts that goes against my values. Most of the time when I am on social media and he comes to me, I scold him harshly. However, this has only resulted in him becoming more aggressive towards me and others. It appears that my attempts to teach him have been unsuccessful, as he tends to ignore me, which is a difficult situation."

Seventeen mothers emphasized their commitment to this goal, acknowledging that verbal instruction about right and wrong can sometimes evoke frustration or resistance in children. As a result, they found that practical demonstrations of moral values in everyday situations fostered more effective learning. Kohlberg (1969) supports this notion, suggesting that children's moral development is significantly influenced by their interactions and exposure to moral examples set by authority figures and peers. This underscores the significance of presenting moral values within real-life contexts, providing children with tangible experiences crucial for their moral progression.

In her account, Ayesha expressed her thoughts,

"Children learn through observation, making it essential for parents to demonstrate discipline themselves. By embodying discipline, parents can motivate their children and serve as positive role models. For instance, if a mother exemplifies discipline and places value on her family, her children are likely to adopt similar qualities. Although it can be challenging, I make an effort to lead by example in my own parenting approach. When my children neglect to tidy their rooms, I kindly request that they clean up the entire space. Initially some resistance was observed from children when it comes to maintaining cleanliness and taking responsibility. However, with time they begin to comprehend the significance of these aspects."

Present study revealed that fifteen mothers have adopted approaches to parenting while all recognizing the importance of instilling moral values in their children. It is worth noting that among these mothers five are active users of social media who prioritize their children's moral development above all else. Occasionally, they may get slightly distracted by social media. Their main focus remains on nurturing moral behavior. Interestingly, ten out of the mothers mentioned that they use social media in a very controlled manner because they are concerned about its potential negative impact on their children's moral development. They expressed worries that excessive screen time could interfere with their ability to respond effectively to their children's needs and cause them to miss out on opportunities to teach values. By imposing restrictions on their own social media usage, mothers demonstrate a well

informed attitude toward the detrimental influence of social media on their children's development, supervising their children to navigate the intricacies of today's digital world. Through their actions they exemplify the notion of responsible parenting in the digital age

As Sadia narrated,

"Once my children were playing in the living room and the table glass was broken. My mother-in-law scolded them for breaking the table glass. My son apologized her for this mishap. However, what truly amazed me was a day later when their grandmother brought up the incident again and reprimanded my son more. In response, my son said; Grannie, don't value things, value people."

It highlights how maternal figures play a role in shaping their children's moral development by instilling values and influencing their perspectives on life. In this analysis, the main focus is on highlighting the role that mothers play in teaching values to their children and how these early lessons continue to shape their moral development.

Sidra shared her perspective saying,

"I am truly dedicated to instilling in my children the importance of respect towards our family. One way I accomplish this is by encouraging my children to use respectful language when addressing our maid, whom they affectionately call 'Aapi'. Similarly, they are taught to show respect when addressing her mother as well. Through this approach I aim to teach my children about the value of relationships and showing reverence for their elders. I firmly believe that by nurturing these values they will build bonds with their loved ones and avoid feeling abandoned."

The mothers unwavering commitment shines through as she endeavors to instill core values of respect within her family circle and towards their maid by promoting the use of respectful terms. The nurturing approach mentioned here focuses on the importance of positivity in relationships. Its aim is to prevent feelings of abandonment and foster moral resilience enabling individuals to develop empathy. In a study conducted by Horowski (2020) the impact of religious teachings on moral development and the integration of faith with ethics were examined. The research suggested that religious education can contribute to growth by fostering virtues and helping individuals navigate ethical challenges (Horowski, 2020). In present research fourteen mothers highlighted the importance of instilling religious values in children. These mothers believe that religious education is important for the moral development of their children.

Furthermore, present research also highlights the significance of maternal involvement in fostering children's moral development. According to the study's findings, mothers play a role in instilling moral values in their children through their guidance, words and actions. These findings align with the research work of Devi et al. (2018), highlighting the importance of maternal parenting styles and secure attachment between mother and child in emotional and moral development of 5-6 years old children, the study found that mothers who have secure attachment with their children and nurture their children with democratic parenting styles produce children with social, emotional and moral capacities that develop very well.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of parents to develop strong moral foundation in their children that will help them grow and succeed in the future.

Nurturing Positivity in Children: Maternal Strategies and Challenges

Teaching values and encouraging positive behaviors in children is of utmost importance for their overall growth. Fifteen mothers, who prioritize socializing their children, shared their methods for teaching patience. To teach patience these mothers employed techniques, like storytelling that focused on narratives to help their children navigate frustrations without feeling overwhelmed.

Mothers employ methods to teach patience, which align with the findings of Recchia et al. (2014) regarding the development of agency through discussions between mothers and children about helping others and causing harm during the early stages of childhood and adolescence. However, present research underscores that techniques like storytelling and providing guidance during valuable moments are used to foster patience and development of positive attitude. However, despite their efforts mothers acknowledge the challenge of instilling a positive outlook in children due to the unpredictable nature of life. These mothers emphasized the importance of encouraging children to maintain a positive perspective even during disagreements with others. They advocated for a balanced approach, providing moral guidance while allowing children to form their own opinions and learn from both the positive and negative aspects of life. Whenever children started developing negative thoughts or feelings towards friends, family, or parents, these mothers stressed the necessity of assisting them in cultivating a more optimistic outlook.

Hira narrated,

“In an ongoing situation, where I've persistently asked their father for days to bring the racket (Game) for children, but due to his work commitments he could not do so. The children begin to feel neglected and perceived their father as unkind. In response, I emphasize the importance of their father's dedication to his job, encouraging patience and understanding, aiming to instill in them a deeper appreciation for his efforts and the value of patience in their daily lives.”

Another respondent, Sadia, shared an insightful approach to instilling positivity in children through charitable giving. Sadia explained,

“The task of helping those in need is a challenging one, and I firmly believe in taking practical steps to make a difference. To cultivate a sense of charitable giving in my children, I allocate a portion of our monthly budget, totaling 20,000 rupees, to provide aid worth 2000 rupees to ten individuals. I involve my children in the process by giving them the responsibility of distributing the aid packets to those in need.”

Through this hands-on experience, the value of spending money to help others is not only learned but also a genuine understanding of the importance of generosity is developed by mothers. The need for constant reminders is eliminated as the act of giving is internalized and a positive impact is actively made on the lives of others by the children. This approach not only cultivates empathy and a sense of generosity in children but also helps them recognize how

their actions can promote positivity within their community.

In present study thirty-two mothers who actively use social media faced difficulties in encouraging positive changes in their children's behavior. To address this challenge they used stories and real life examples to illustrate the consequences of behavior. However, they also encountered instances of hostility and frustration along the way. Despite these obstacles the mothers recognized the importance of modeling optimism. Being mindful of their actions as these greatly influenced their children's perspective and ethical decision making. Another participant named Sana shares her experience of disciplining her daughter harshly while being distracted by her smartphone and regrets after the incidents as she realized the detrimental effects of that incident on her relationship with her daughter, afterwards she tried hard to engage with her daughter by having conversations. This is a reminder for parental actions that can affect the well being of children.

Hence, the findings from this study emphasize how mothers shape their children's moral perspectives on life, shedding light on the importance of attentive and responsive parenting practices. It also suggests maternal behavior as role model for children, thereby accentuating the significance of mindful parenting and social media usage to foster children's moral growth and positive life experiences.

4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Present study examines the complex interplay between maternal social media usage and children's moral development. The study highlights the important role of mothers in balancing the inculcation of values with digital distractions. Mothers use a variety of strategies to foster patience and positivity in their children, from active listening to charitable work. The findings highlight the impact of maternal behavior as a role model and emphasize the importance of responsible use of social media. Overall, the study highlights the enduring responsibility of parents to build a strong moral foundation for their children's resilience and empathy as they navigate through life.

Following recommendations are made on the basis of present study's results for enhancing the moral development of future generation:

1. It is important for mothers to prioritize their children rather than social media usage for better healthy family environment.
2. To educate mothers regarding the influence of social media usage on children's moral development through seminars, workshops and courses.
3. Mothers should actively demonstrate kindness, positivity and moral values to children, as children imitate parental behavior.
4. Mothers should not employ physical punishments with children; rather give them punishments that would help them learn, for instance, withdrawing privileges.
5. Imparting religious education in children's socialization to encourage better moral development in children.

Therefore, in order to raise ethically strong children in the digital age, mothers can contribute to children's moral development by implementing these recommendations.

Conflict interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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