RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on Parental Perception on Children's Online Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The study titled "Parental Perception on Children's Online Behavior" examines how parents navigate the complexities of managing their children's online activities in the face of increasing digital engagement. With widespread internet access through smartphones, social media, and gaming platforms, children are exposed to numerous online risks, including cyberbullying, online predators, and privacy breaches, which have heightened parental concerns. Based on a survey of 129 parents with children aged less than 18 years, the research highlights key parental concerns, such as online gaming addiction, excessive screen time, and privacy risks. It also reveals the negative impacts of prolonged internet use on children's physical health, academic performance, and social interactions, including decreased physical activity, impaired sleep, and strained family relationships. Parents who regularly monitor their children's online activities—by checking devices, discussing internet usage, and using parental control tools—are more aware of the risks. However, the study finds that parents with higher digital literacy sometimes underestimate online dangers, leading to less vigilant oversight. Cultural and socio-economic factors also influence how parents approach online safety. While some parents, particularly those with lower digital literacy, rely on restrictive measures like screen time limits or monitoring software, others adopt more communicative strategies, fostering open discussions about online risks. Overly restrictive approaches can backfire, as children may bypass controls and expose themselves to more risks. The study concluded that a balanced approach, combining active monitoring, open communication, and improved digital literacy, is essential for effective digital parenting. It calls for increased education and awareness to help parents better understand the digital landscape and navigate the challenges of modern parenting. These insights are valuable for policymakers, educators, and parents in developing strategies to protect children in an increasingly digital world.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of the internet and mobile technologies has fundamentally changed how children interact with the world, presenting both significant opportunities and challenges (Haleem *et al.,* 2022). As children increasingly engage with digital platforms, concerns among parents about the implications of their children's online behavior have grown more pronounced (Sciacca *et al.,* 2022). Understanding how parents perceive and respond to their children's online activities is crucial, particularly in multicultural societies such as Australia, where diverse cultural backgrounds, varying levels of technological adaptation, and socio-economic factors play pivotal roles in shaping these perceptions (Shin and Lwin, 2022*)*

Research suggested that while many parents feel confident in managing their children's internet use, this confidence can sometimes lead to less active

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engagement and communication regarding online safety (Nguyen *et al.,* 2022*)*. The disparity between the technological expertise of children and their parents further complicates efforts to safeguard children from potential online risks, as children often possess a higher level of digital literacy than their parents (El-Asam *et al.,* 2021*)*. In multicultural contexts, parents from different ethnic backgrounds may encounter additional challenges in monitoring and guiding their children's online behavior, often feeling less equipped to address the associated risks (Ramos, G., & Chavira, D. A. 2022*)*.

The duality of internet use, encompassing its benefits and risks, is a recurring theme in parental perceptions. While parents acknowledge the educational and social opportunities that the internet offers, they also express concerns about its negative impacts on their children's health and well-being, particularly in relation to physical and psycho-behavioral aspects (Stoilova *et al.,* 2021).The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these concerns, with physical distancing and an increased reliance on online platforms contributing to a decline in essential social behaviors and independence among children (Zhang *et al.,* 2022)Moreover, the transition to online education during this period has raised alarms about the potential adverse effects on children's physical and mental health, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to technology use (Theberath *et al.,* 2022).

In light of these complex and evolving issues, the present study aims to explore parental perceptions of children's online behavior, with a particular focus on how parents from various ethnic communities perceive the associated risks and benefits (Tynan *et al., 2022*). By examining the strategies parents employ to manage their children's digital activities, this research seeks to provide insights into the broader implications for parenting in a digitally connected, multicultural society. The specific objectives of the study are i) To evaluate the extent of parental awareness regarding their children's online activities and the tools they use to monitor and manage these activities, ii) To analyze parental concerns related to various online risks and how these concerns influence their monitoring practices and communication with their children about online safety and iii)To assess the impact of children's online behavior on their overall well-being and academic performance from the perspective of their parents.

Rani, M., andKumari, S. (2022) examined digital parenting practices in urban Indian families, focusing on strategies used to ensure children's online safety. Their research highlighted the challenges faced by parents in implementing these strategies and the impact of socioeconomic factors on digital parenting approaches. The study provided valuable insights into the evolving nature of parental perceptions in urban India. Gupta, R., and Deb, S. (2021) explored the challenges faced by Indian parents in monitoring their adolescents' internet use. They proposed strategies for effective parental supervision in the digital age, considering the unique cultural and social context of Indian families. The study highlighted the importance of open communication and digital literacy in addressing parental concerns about online safety. Kapoor, N., and Sharma, R. (2021) examined the relationship between parental digital literacy and concerns about children's online activities in the Indian context. Their research highlights how parents' own understanding of digital technologies influences their perceptions of online risks and benefits for their children. The study emphasized the need for digital literacy initiatives targeting parents.

Livingstone, S., and Blum-Ross, A. (2020) explored the complex landscape of digital parenting, examining how parents balance hopes and fears about technology in their children's lives. They discuss the challenges parents face in navigating the digital world, including concerns about online risks and the potential benefits of technology for children's development and future opportunities. The authors provided insights into how parental perceptions shape family dynamics in the digital age. Dutta, S., and Gangopadhyay, S. (2019) examined the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Indian parents in the digital age. They consider cultural and socioeconomic factors that influence parental perceptions and practices, highlighting the need for context-specific digital parenting approaches. The study provides valuable insights into the complexities of raising children in India's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Hegazy *et al.* (2019) Examine parents' concerns about the health effects of mobile and internet use. Many parents perceive that the internet has more negative than positive effects on their children's well-being, particularly when it comes to overuse of mobile

devices and exposure to inappropriate content. This concern drives many parents to adopt more restrictive approaches, but these strategies may not always be effective if they are not coupled with education and dialogue about responsible internet use. Nagarajan, S., and Vijayalakshmi, P. (2018) investigated parental awareness and monitoring practices regarding children's internet use in India. Their study highlighted the need for increased digital literacy among Indian parents, revealing gaps in parental understanding of online risks and safe internet practices. The research emphasized the importance of culturally relevant digital parenting strategies in the Indian context. Shin, W., and Li, B. (2017) investigated parental mediation strategies for children's digital technology use in Singapore. While not focused on India, their study offered valuable insights into parental perceptions and practices in an Asian context, providing a comparative perspective that may be relevant to understanding Indian parental attitudes.

Alqahtani *et al.* (2017) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia, highlighting that cultural norms and societal expectations also influence parental mediation practices. While parents are keen to monitor their children's online activities, many lack the necessary knowledge and tools to do so effectively. Radesky, J. S *et al.,* (2015) reviewed the potential benefits and risks of young children's use of mobile devices. Their work provides insights into parental concerns and emphasizes the need for balanced approaches to technology use. The authors discuss how parental perceptions of mobile media influence children's screen time and content consumption, highlighting the importance of informed parental guidance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive methodology to identify the parental perception of online behavior of children. Purposive sampling was employed as a technique. A total of 129 respondents were chosen for the study among the locality of Tamil Nadu, which was carried out from month of June 2023 to September 2024. Data was acquired through a well-structured online survey. A 5-point Likert scale was used to record the customer response to the parental perception of children's online behavior. (5= Strongly agree; 4= Agree; 3= Neutral; 2= Disagree; 1= Strongly Disagree). Multi Nominal Logit regression and Garrette Ranking were used to achieve the goal while taking into account the following variables.

Table 1: Variables

S.No	Variables
1	Constant
2	Age
3	Residency
4	Education Qualification
5	Occupation
6	Annual Income
7	Reviewing child's online activity
8	Confident in knowledge of the social media platforms
9	Discuss your child's online activities with them
10	Aware of the privacy settings on the apps and websites
11	Child understands the risks associated with online behavior
12	Open to discussing their online experiences with you
13	Child's online behavior affect their relationships with family
14	Child's online behavior impact their academic performance
15	Child spends too much time online
16	Child's online behavior affect their physical health

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Multinomial Logit Regression Results of parental perception on children's' online behavior

The logistic regression analysis was performed to measure the parental perception on childrens' online behavior with dichotomous dependent variables as awareness of (Impact = 1, Not Impact = 0) as exogenous variables as viz.,age, residence, education qualification, occupation, annual income, reviewing their children online activity, confident in knowledge of social media platform, discussing with children online activities with them, aware of the privacy settings on the apps and websites, concerned are about the children being exposed to online bullying, child understands the risks associated with online behavior, open to discussing their online experiences with you, child's online behavior affect their relationships with family, child's online behavior impact their academic performance, child spends too much time online, child's online behavior affect their physical health are categorical variables chosen as the independent variables. The result was presented in the following Table 1.

Log-likelihood = (−62.38106)
Likelihood ratio test: Chi-square (20) = 51.2612[0.0001]

From the logit regression model, it could be evident that the annual income of the parents demonstrates a 1 per centnegative significance with a coefficient of -5.87477E-06 and p value of 0.0051 with parental perception of children's online behavior. Active monitoring of a child's online activity is a significant predictor of higher parental awareness, as evidenced by a coefficient of 0.854865 and a p-value of 0.0058, which demonstrates a positive significance at a 1 per cent level. This suggested that parents who regularly review their child's online behavior are more adjusted to the associated impacts.

Higher confidence in knowledge of social media platforms is negatively associated with an awareness coefficient of -1.05935, demonstrates a negative significance at a 5 per cent level, indicating that such confidence may be linked to a lower perceived impact of online behavior.

Table 1: Parental perception on children's' online behavior:

Sl.No	Variable	Coefficient	p-value
1	Constant	-0.848	0.773
2	Age	0.034	0.393
3	Residency	0.111	0.704
4	Education Qualification	-0.561*	0.070
5	Occupation	0.422	0.244
6	Annual Income	-5.874E-***	0.005
7	Reviewing child's online activity	0.854***	0.005
8	Confident in knowledge of the social media platforms	-1.059**	0.030
9	Discuss your child's online activities with them	-0.478	0.19
10	Aware of the privacy settings on the apps and websites	0.215	0.316
11	Child understands the risks associated with online behavior	-0.695*	0.060
12	Open to discussing their online experiences with you	0.753	0.117
13	Child's online behavior affect their relationships with family	0.082	0.847
14	Child's online behavior impact their academic performance	0.334	0.399
15	Child spends too much time online	0.655*	0.078
16	Child's online behavior affect their physical health	0.398	0.279

(Note: *** is 1% level of significance, ** is 5% level of significance, *is 10% level of significance)

Education qualification has a negative significance at a 10 per cent level coefficient of -0.561789, which might be weakly associated with a reduced perception of online behavior and the Child understands the risks associated with online behavior, it also has a negative significance at a 10 per cent level coefficient of -0.695055, which demonstrated a marginal significance at the 10 per cent level. Perception that a child spends too much time online has a coefficient of 0.655802 and a p-value of 0.0789 has a marginally significant positive effect with a 10 per cent level, suggesting that concerns about excessive online time may enhance awareness of online behavior impacts. Age, residency and occupation also show no significant impact on parental awareness. Discussing online activities with the child, awareness of privacy settings, and understanding online risks do not significantly affect parental awareness. Overall, the analysis underscores the importance of active engagement in monitoring online activities and reviewing child's online activity as key factors influencing parental awareness. Other factors, including age, education, and residency, appear to have minimal influence on parental perceptions of online behavior impacts.

Parental concerns on children's online use

Garrette ranking analysis identifies several critical risks associated with online use among children. As shown in Table 2, addiction to online games is emerging as the most pressing issue. This top-ranked concern underscores the significant adverse effects that excessive gaming can have on children's overall health and development. The pervasive nature of gaming can lead to negative outcomes, including diminished academic performance, reduced social interaction, and decreased physical activity. Such extensive engagement with online games can disrupt normal developmental processes and impact children's social skills and physical well-being.

It could be inferred from the above table 2 that concern about excessive screen time, which encompasses all forms of prolonged exposure to digital devices. This risk includes not only gaming but also extensive use of social media and other online activities. Excessive screen time is associated with a range of physical health issues, such as eye strain and sleep disturbances, as well as a reduction in physical activity. These factors collectively highlight the potential long-term health impacts and underscore the need for effective strategies to manage and limit screen time.

Privacy concerns rank third, highlighting the critical importance of protecting personal information in the digital realm. Children often lack a full understanding of the risks associated with sharing personal data online, which can lead to privacy trespass and increased susceptibility to exploitation or identity theft. This finding emphasizes the need for comprehensive education on online privacy and the implementation of robust protective measures.

The fourth-ranked risk involves online predators, reflecting concerns about the potential for harmful interactions with individuals who may seek to exploit or abuse children through online platforms. This risk necessary heightened vigilance and proactive measures by parents and guardians to safeguard children from such threats.

Lastly, cyberbullying, although significant, is ranked fifth. This indicates that while cyberbullying is a serious issue with severe psychological repercussions, including anxiety and depression, it is perceived as less prevalent compared to other risks such as addiction and excessive screen time. However, addressing cyberbullying remains essential in mitigating its harmful effects on children's mental health and ensuring a safer online experience.

Table 2. Parental concerns on children's online activity

S.No	Constraints	Garrette score	Rank
1	Addiction to Games	55	I
2	Excessive screen time	52	II
3	Privacy issues	49	III
4	Online predators	48	IV
5	Cyberbullying	47	V

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that while the digital world offers significant benefits to children, such as learning opportunities and social engagement, it also presents numerous risks that require careful mediation by parents. The findings emphasize the importance of active parental engagement, open communication, and the need for parents to enhance their digital literacy to better safeguard their children. Also highlights that a balanced approach, where children are guided rather than restricted, proves to be more effective in fostering responsible online behavior.

Ultimately, the study underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that empower parents with the knowledge and tools necessary to protect their children from online risks while ensuring they can benefit from the positive aspects of the digital age.

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