

# Smartphone, a Helping Hand

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**Abstract:** Various research study and news articles reported that communication devices, such as smartphones or tablets, have changed families' communication. Technology has replaced the parental function to provide entertainment, communication, and education. Users' low skill of media literacy was a significant challenge in the digital age that requires ever-accelerating adaptation in all of these areas. Through the current research study, it has been revealed that there is a need for parents to be media literate in order to establish mutual communication with their children in this digital age. This research explored how parents use the newest digital technology, particularly smartphones and tablets, in relation to traditional media, for instance, TV, video games, and computer in the parenting practices. This research focused on 150 parents, whose age is around 22-39 years old, who have early years children. The problem discussed was the parenting style in this gadget-rich era. The study found that gadgets were not the respondents' first choice to help their parenting. The devices have become the second choice in certain circumstance to help them out from challenge in parenting. On the other hand, 52% of them used deprivation of the gadget usage as disciplinary action. This research study has showed a current model of communication between parents and children in the gadget-rich era. However, the literature review suggested that this model should have been revised by enriching parental skill of technological based media literacy.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Technology is an entity that is inseparable from human life in the 21st century. From the morning until night before going to bed, people cannot be far away from technology, especially the information and communication technology. As reported by We Are Social, a media company from UK, in January 2018 active users of social media in Indonesia reached 130 million (49%) of total population. As many as 120 million Indonesians used mobile devices, such as smartphones or tablets to access social media (Pertiwi, 2018). Smartphones and tablets are very popular and useful because those gadgets allow users to search and store information, send emails, communicate with instant messaging, play games, and even work. Everything can be done at the same time.

Smartphones and tablets not only change the way people work and socialize, but also change the way family members communicate to each others. There are families, especially those who are separated by distance, which are easily connected by technology. They can communicate anytime and anywhere.

Moreover, smartphone's features facilitate not only audio but also visual. Family members can communicate as if they are talking face to face.

However, the technology let people face negative impact as well. Many family members complained about other family members who considered busy with their smartphones. In a gathering event such as dinner or recreation, face to face communication is not effective even though they are in the same place because each family member is busy with their devices. They are communicating with people who are far away. Ironically, they do not necessarily get to know closer to the people they are living with.

Previously, television became an important part of the family, but now the internet has changed many things. Not only make human's work easier, the internet has the risk of divulging private information, providing information that should not be accessed, such as pornography and violence.

Although it has a negative influence, the existence of communication technology cannot be avoided anymore. Internet bringing two way communication into a home, allowing outside world into the family space. Thus, though media are an integral part of the home environment, they often

seem like uninvited strangers (Alexander, Media and the Family, 2008).

Media also changes the pattern of interaction between family members. When there is media placed in the bedroom, each family member will spend more time there than interaction with other members in the family room (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001).

Survey conducted by Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) in 2017 shows that most internet user are 19-34 years old (Nabila, 2018). However it is undeniably, even early childhood children are more familiar with internet, and of course device like smartphone. Another survey by Indonesia Hottest Insight in 2013 indicates that 40% children in Indonesia are technologically literate, or also called active internet users (Wulandari, 2016). How early childhood is familiar with smartphone certainly cannot be separated from the role of their parents.

CouponCodes4u surveyed 2403 parents from across United States, and more than half of them admit that they allow their children to play with smartphone. Result shows that parents has several reason. The most common reason is take a break from parenting, the second is parents want to enjoy their 'me-time', and the least reason is to keep their children quiet (DailyMail, 2013). According to researchers' observations, such conditions also happen in Indonesia.

According to De Bell and Chapman, internet use among American children aged 6-8 is doubled. While in 2003, 91% of children from 3 years old to 12th grade use computers, and 59% use internet (Jones & Park, Virtual Worlds: Young Children Using the Internet, 2015).

Exposure to gadget from early age is feared to result in some adverse effects on children. Simon and Memeth concern about: children spend too much time with technology and it will dominate their activities; infants and toddlers are being forced to use technology; and children will be exposed to inappropriate content and inappropriate marketing (Jones & Park, Virtual Worlds: Young Children Using the Internet, 2015).

In Indonesia, only two days after opening a complaint service for children suspected of being addicted to gadgets, the Indonesia Child Protection Commission has received 10 reports from various region (Suryowati, 2018). This condition certainly needs a serious concern. The increase in the number of smartphone and internet users in Indonesia is not immediately followed by the speed of media literacy. In a research about The World's Most

Literate Nations (WMLN) published in 2016, Indonesia ranks 60th out of 61 countries (Miller & McKenna, 2016). That level is very low comparing with high number of gadget users in this country. Therefore, researchers think that it is important to know how parents tend to use smartphones and tablets while they are with their children.

Research with similar topic previously conducted by Center on Media and Human Development, Northwestern University. That study explores how parents in US are incorporating new digital technologies as well as older media platforms into their family lives and parenting practices. It is based on an extensive survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 2300 parents of children from birth to eight years old (Wartella, Rideout, Lauricella, & Connell, 2014).

This research focus on parents lives in Surabaya (Indonesia second largest city), whose childre is 0-5 years old. This age range is the foundation for the development of the brain and physical. Adult interaction with the child during this period is regarded as the key to brain development (Leung, Leung, & Chan, 2005). Moreover, at this age, the child has not undergone compulsory education classes so that their interactions are mostly with families, in this case parents.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Parents-child Communication

Parents are the first people a child commonly meet. Children supposed to learn everything from parents. In general, parents has responsibility to nurture their children. Nurturing includes communication that is central to encouraging development, including both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are encouraging and supportive (LePoire, 2006).

Communication between parents and children including both verbal and nonverbal messages. Children benefit from being frequently reminded of their parents' love, warmth, and involvement, both verbally and nonverbally (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Therefore children need the real existence of their parents.

The pattern of parent-child communication affects many things in children's future life. According to Bowlby, the nature of the parent-infant interaction sets a template for social relationships that the child will carry with him or her for life. (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Social relationships

including their future relationships with spouse or relationships with friends which influence by their positive view of self. Grew up in a warm, intact family or in a cold, broken family will greatly influence one's view of relationships.

Parents are also the main source for children to learn manners, social norms, as well as basic human abilities to survive. Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, and Myers-Walls classified parenting roles as involving activities such as caring for oneself, managing resources (money, housing, and food), guiding and motivating children, and connecting effectively to social systems such as child care and schools, to ensure that children get the resources they need (Dworking, Walker, Rudi, & Doty, 2015). Successful parenting not only results in positive child outcomes and in healthy relationships between parent and child, but also in fostering the caregiver's own maturation and development (Walker, 2015).

## 2.2 Children and Technology

Today's generation of children cannot be compared to past generations. They are referred to generation Z, born after 1996 and some experts call them post-millennials. This generation are very familiar with technology, even since they were still in the womb. That's why they belong to the digital natives group, who born and raised with great technological involvement.

A report by Common Sense Media shows that in US, children 8 and younger spent 48 minutes a day staring at a mobile screen. It has tripled in just four years. Also found that 42% of respondents now have their own tablet devices (Howard, 2017).

Previously, the AsianParent Insights did a survey in 2014 to 2500 parents in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines. Surprisingly, 98% respondents allow their kid using smartphone/tablet. Their children mostly use smartphone/tablet for playing games, approximately in an hour per usage.

The numbers above will certainly continue to increase because the development of the device is increasingly diverse and the price is getting cheaper. Without proper literacy for parents and children, this condition is feared to cause adverse effects on child development and family relationships.

## 2.3 Effects of Gadget Exposures on Parents and Children

This development later became a prolonged dilemma among child development experts and

parents. Some say, technology has a positive impact on child development. Others say otherwise.

According to Jordan, Hersey, McDivitt, Heitzler, technology may have a slightly different role in the lives of parents though, as a resource they can draw on to fulfill certain responsibilities that come along with parenthood (Villegas, 2013). One of the primary findings in another research was how, "parents believe that media are important element to keep the family close and the system running smoothly." It seems that most parents support and encourage children's use of digital devices (Jones & Park, *Virtual Worlds: Young Children Using the Internet*, 2015).

One of the application that parents might like is e-book or digital book. It is a complete package including picture books, talking books, interactive books. High-quality, developmentally-appropriate e-books can be used to scaffold young children's literacy experiences. The combine use of traditional picture of books and e-books, with adult support, considered as the best way to address the needs of diverse group of young children and individual children with varied interest, literacy levels, and special needs (Barnyak & McNelly, 2015).

According to Yves Punie, gadget allows children to study the learning contents in an interesting and entertaining way. It is also increases children's competences in digital literacy and technical skills which are needed for employment, education, and self-development in the modern society (Vodopivec, 2014). Shortly, this tool allows children to explore the world in a fast, easy, and inexpensive way.

Even it has a lot of advantages, gadget also has many disadvantages. According to Young People and New Media (YNPM) research, nowadays children tends to spend time at home, with their gadget rather than outdoors (Livingstone, 2002). This condition can affect a child's ability to socialize. They are more accustomed to virtual relationships rather than to humans. In 1999, while internet was not so popular and television was the major media at home, American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a warning to limit children's 'screen-time' because the longer they watch TV, the less time they interact with parents or caregiver (Barr, 2008). This concern is certainly increasing because the duration of smartphone usage is now also increasing sharply.

Unappropriated contents also become a serious concern of smartphone usage. Digital cable and wireless internet make certain types of content, such as violence and sex, readily available to young children (Alexander, Media and the Family, 2008).

Another issue regarding smartphone usage is about privacy security. Protection of privacy has long been a concern. In practice, many attributes of the internet prove highly challenging for individual user rights to control their personal data. Many internet users have become accustomed to click 'accept' button and consenting to provide their data without carefully read the terms of service or privacy policy of the site (Mendel, Puddephatt, Wagner, Hawtin, & Torres, 2012).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research study was a quantitative approach. This study's aim was to describe systematically, data-based writing toward facts and the character of population or certain object (Kriyantono, 2006, p. 69). This method was used to describe in general how parents and children communicate in this digital-rich era. This approach did not need an in-depth look at a certain object but generally depict the broader fact. The researchers used survey with questionnaire as the instrument.

The sample of this research study was from a population of parents who lives in Surabaya whose children are early childhood to teenager—the population who were struggling with technological based media as their everyday communication tool. The researcher approached the sampling using quota technique through an online procedure. The sample of this research study was 150 parents who filled out the online questionnaire.

Questionnaire we use in this research adopted from research conducted by Center on Media and Human Development, Northwestern University. We modified some questions based on special characteristics of this study, such as the age of the children and variety of gadget (Wartella, Rideout, Lauricella, & Connell, 2014).

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Gen Y Parents

According to the data, 83 respondents were 31-40 years old, 61 respondents were 21-30 years old, and only 7 respondents were over 40 years old. This data showed that majority of the parents were Gen Y, who born in 1977-1995. This generation was also a technology-literate generation and connected 24 hours a day (Sulaiman & Al-Muscatti, 2017) through devices.

The background of the respondent's profession was diverse. There were 61 respondents worked as entrepreneurs. The 63 respondents work in varied fields, such as tourism, hospitality, finance, health, education, and culinary. Only 26 respondents were full housewives. In terms of educational background, respondents were considered well educated because 97 of them had completed a bachelor's degree education, 19 respondents had finished their master degree, and one respondent got a Ph.D degree.

Even though the majority of parents were Gen Y, they were not fully gadget dependent-type of parents when they take care of their children. They still used traditional activities such as reading books or playing traditional games. In fact, 76 respondents argued, smartphones had negative impact on children's socialization abilities. Likewise in terms of physical activity, 78 respondents thought smartphone also give a negative impact.

Profile of respondents of this study were parents who were well educated and well literate. They gained information regarding the positive and negative impacts of gadget in children's lives. Therefore, they prevented the unwanted impact from the early stage, so that their children would not addicted to gadget.

### 4.2 Gadget as a Helping Hand

In answering the question of this research study, there were three primary questions we asked to the respondents: In the family time, what activities you enjoy together? How much you allow your kids to use gadgets at home? What activities you let your kids do when you are engage a busy task?

All the respondents of this study were classified into 'working age group', whose age are 15-64. They were considered as the most productive group. The data showed that more than 50% of the respondents were entrepreneurs. Moreover, 90% of the respondents had earned their undergraduate degree in various disciplines. Thus, according to the respondents' profiles, they were considered as a flexible time manager type of parents. This group should have sufficient time to guide their children themselves. In addition, this sample were classified as a well educated group who should gain a proper literacy in media and technology usage.

Regarding the gadget literacy, data showed that more than 75% of the respondents own both smartphone and gadget. However, they did not just let their kids to play those gadget in their own room. The parents created a control procedure for their

kids to play the gadget in their room. There were 84 respondents who were not permitted to play the gadget more than one hour. The others let the kids to play only for 1-2 hours per day. It indicated that the parents had sensed the negative impact of uncontrollable gadget usage.

More than 75% of the respondents admitted that face to face interaction activities with the children were still favored in the families. More than 90% of the respondents like to read with their children. The same number also practice family activities, such as watching television, singing together, outdoor playing, boardgaming, doing sports, and cooking. Interestingly, 75 respondents confessed that playing with smartphone or tablet was not really interesting for them as family activity.

Back in the 1900s to 2000s, before the raise of smartphone and tablet, parents-children activities for more well educated families were varied, such as reading, storytelling, teaching words and numbers, music, arts, and craft (Schaub, 2015). In addition, Lopez *et al* (2015) agreed that the increase of technological-based communication device had altered the families' structure, deprived the families' tradition, and increase the individualism over the families' function. The 1900s' kids were now parents who inherit the custom activities from their family. The activities with family were not only a need but also a tradition. According to Schaub (2015), the more well educated families would practiced and hold the families' tradition stronger rather than the non educated families. Thus, even though those 1900s kids—who now were parents—living in a gadget-rich era, the non-gadget families' activities tradition were still alive in their families.

In 2001, Hughes and Hans (2001) conducted a research to seek the role of technology in a family. They concluded that the largest increase of technological useage in a family was for educational purpose and communication. However, nowadays, the view of the smartphone usage on children was more negative because the increase of addiction to the entertainment features provided in smartphone (Cha and Kyung-Seo, 2018). In this current research study, parents view on smartphone and tablet were changed. They were not only use those gadget for educational and leisure purposes, but a helping hands.

When it came to a question “In the family time, what activities you enjoy together?”, the data showed that more than 75% of respondents selected the face to face family activities, such as board gaming, ourdoor playing, reading, singing, and cooking. However, for the question “What activities

you let your kids do when you are engage a busy task?”, the data indicated that 50% of the respondents chose smartphone and gadget as the caregiver for their children. In addition, for this purpose, the parents were not permitted their kids to use those gadget more than 2 hours.

For this sample group, the smartphone and gadget were not the first choice for their family activities. They considered those devices as a helping hand for parents when they were in a critical situation, such as when parents were involving busy task or when the children were in emotional mood.

Wang, Roache, Pusateri (2018) stated that parents have the most significant role in children development, especially in communication and life skill. There were two important factors in the parent-children communication in this gadget-rich era: effectivity and appropriateness. This two factors were pivotal keys in technological literacy for parents and children. When parents know what was the most effective way to teach and to communicate with their children, they would use that method instead of following the trend. In this current study, the data indicated that the parent group was those who earned their undergraduate degree. They must have read been exposed to the positive and negative impact of technology for their children.

Another factor was appropriateness. According to the data, majority of the parents used gadget only in a certain circumstance and with certain conditions. They allowed their kids to use smartphone or tablet only when they were engaging critical situation. Other than that, they chose to play with their children themselves. Thus, the parents understand the appropriate based concept of gadget usage for children.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In this research study, parents used gadget only in a certain circumstance and with certain conditions. They allowed their kids to use smartphone or tablet only when they were engaging critical situation. This parent's behavior also affected by their education and technological literacy background.

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