

Navigating Digital Challenges: The Role of Digital Parenting in Child Protection and Mental Well-being

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies are evolving in many aspects of children's life such as in learning methodologies, communication, and social skills which simultaneously increasing their exposure to cyber-social risks such as cyberbullying, online grooming, digital exploitation, privacy breaches, and harmful online content. This conceptual paper examines the role of digital parenting in enhancing child protection and promoting children's mental well-being in the digital era. Through a synthesis of existing literature, the paper integrates three interconnected domains: digital parenting, child protection, and mental well-being. Digital parenting is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing parental mediation, monitoring, communication, emotional support, guidance, digital literacy, supervision, and collaborative engagement in children's digital activities. Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) is employed to explain how parents' awareness and perceptions of online risks motivate protective behaviors that enhance children's online safety. In addition, Seligman's PERMA framework is adopted to explain how protected and positive digital experiences contribute to children's mental well-being through positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The paper proposes a conceptual framework in which effective digital parenting strengthens child protection mechanisms, reducing children's vulnerability to cyber-related harms while fostering resilience, emotional stability, social connectedness, and overall psychological well-being. The framework contributes to the literature by integrating digital parenting, child protection, and mental well-being into a unified model and highlights digital parenting as both a protective and developmental process. The study also supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), by promoting children's safety, digital resilience, and positive development in digital environments.

Keywords: Digital parenting; child protection; mental well-being; cyber-social risks; Protection Motivation Theory (PMT); PERMA framework; SDGs.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and technological advancement have accelerated the transition from industrial society to an information-based society. The integration of modern information technologies has profoundly influenced political systems, national development, social interactions, collective awareness, and citizen engagement. The emergence of the internet, social media, and new digital technologies within families worldwide has created an increasingly borderless flow of information and communication (Ria Novianti et al., 2023; Erstad et al., 2024). As digital natives, children and adolescents are growing up in highly connected environments where smartphones, social media platforms, online gaming, artificial intelligence (AI), and other digital technologies have become integral to their daily lives. Globally, active internet users have surpassed nearly 5.4 billion, which is more than 75 percent of the global population, highlighting the growing dependence on digital technologies across societies in 2024 (Kemp, 2024).

According to the United Nations (UN), approximately 82 percent of individuals aged 15–24 years were internet users in 2025, making youth the most digitally connected age group globally. Over 65 percent of teenagers engage with internet usage on daily basis, with an increasing number spending over four hours online each day. OECD (2023) report revealed that nearly 60 percent of adolescents have encountered at least one form of online cyber-social risk. This trend places children and adolescents among the most vulnerable groups to cyber-social risks, making them particularly susceptible to online threats including cyberbullying, online grooming, online sexual exploitation and abuse, privacy violations, gaming addiction, screen dependency, and social media pressure. At the same time, adolescents' online activities have shown growing tendencies toward digital delinquency, such as exposure to online drug-related content and curiosity about hacking activities. Such risks can have serious consequences for children's psychological, emotional, and physical well-being (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022). Therefore, ensuring children's safe and healthy digital environments has become a growing concern among parents, researchers, educators, policymakers, and child protection agencies worldwide.

In response to these challenges, multiple stakeholders play important roles in safeguarding children in digital environments. Technology companies continue to develop digital safety features and parental control mechanisms, while educational institutions increasingly integrate digital citizenship and online safety education into their curricula. However, despite these institutional efforts, parents remain the first line of protection in guiding children's digital experiences. As primary caregivers, parents are uniquely positioned to monitor, educate, support, and monitor their children's interactions with digital devices and platforms. This is because, these technologies provide numerous opportunities for educational enrichment, social interaction, creativity, and skill development, enabling children to engage in a highly connected digital society. Furthermore, digital platforms facilitate communication, collaboration, and information sharing, allowing children to participate more actively in an increasingly knowledge-based and technology-driven world.

This growing parental responsibility has contributed to the importance of online parenting, which incorporating the strategies, practices, and competencies employed by parents to help children navigate digital environments safely, responsibly, and productively. Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to develop a framework that explains the role of digital parenting in enhancing child protection and promoting child's mental well-being in the internet era. Specifically, the study aims to explore the key dimensions of online parenting, explore their influence on child protection, and discuss how effective child protection contributes to positive mental well-being outcomes among children. The proposed framework is expected to provide valuable insights for parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers while advancing the understanding of digital parenting as a protective mechanism for supporting children's safe and positive development in an evolving digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dimensions of digital parenting

Digital parenting is considered the most prominent concept in contemporary discussions of parenting within technologically mediated environments. Broadly defined, digital parenting encompasses the different approaches of efforts and appropriate of guidance employed by parents to guide, monitor, support, and regulate their children's use of digital technologies (Benedetto & Ingrassia, 2021). Nannatt et al. (2025) further conceptualized digital parenting as a form of internet parenting shaped by the main fundamental dimensions: control (expectations) and warmth (responsiveness). The dimension of warmth encompasses emotional support, affection, and open communication between parents and children regarding internet use, whereas the control dimension refers to parental efforts to regulate and supervise children's digital engagement through the establishment of rules, monitoring of online activities, and provision of appropriate guidance. Similarly, Tan et al. (2024) explained that digital parenting comprises at least three key dimensions: parental involvement in children's digital technology use, the incorporation of digital technologies into parenting practices, and parents' own digital competencies and skills.

With the rapid evolving of digital era and the advancement of mobile applications, parents are now highly recommended to navigate the involvement of their children in online environment. The role of parents is getting complex and more challenging in many aspects of parenting styles. Parents are no longer solely responsible for

protecting children from cyber-social risks but are also expected to foster children's digital competence, digital resilience, and overall digital well-being (Natalie et al., 2024; Amanda et al., 2024; Nikken & Schols, 2015). Livingstone and Helsper (2008), Kirwil (2009), and Nikken and Jansz (2014) introduced additional dimensions such as technical mediation, monitoring, content-specific restrictions, and supervision of online activities. Technical mediation refers to the use of parental control applications, content-filtering tools, screen-time limits, and digital monitoring technologies to manage children's internet activities and excess to digital information.

The literature further indicates that digital parenting is no longer viewed as a one-way mechanism of parental control. As highlighted by Arumugam (2026), parenting styles play a significant role in shaping children's developmental and educational outcomes through parental warmth, communication, monitoring, and guidance. These core parenting functions remain relevant in the digital age, although they are now applied to children's online activities, digital interactions, and technology use (Zheng et al., 2025). Modecki et al. (2022) and Amanda et al. (2024) also added that trust-based relationships, open communication, and shared learning experiences have become essential elements of contemporary digital parenting. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of digital parenting depends not only on the degree of parental control but also on the healthy parent-child relationships and communications within digital environments. However, parents often face considerable pressure to choose the “right” judgements regarding their children's gadgets use and frequently feel fully responsible for monitoring, regulating, and protecting children from digital risks (Smith & Lee, 2023).

Conversely, parenting practices that encourage autonomy while providing appropriate guidance and communication appear to be more effective in promoting positive digital behaviors. According to Zhang et al., (2021) and Rahman (2022), effective online parenting requires a harmonious combination of supervision, emotional support, and independence, enabling children to develop self-regulation skills and make responsible decisions in. In this regard, parents are increasingly recognized as the first line of defense in ensuring children's online safety. This shift reflects a movement away from overly controlling parenting styles toward more flexible and responsive approaches that address children's evolving needs in digital contexts. Accordingly, digital parenting in this study is viewed as a contemporary parenting approach that influences children's social well-being, digital safety, and developmental outcomes in an increasingly technology-driven society (Nikken & Schols, 2015).

Various forms of digital parenting, including restrictive mediations, co-use mediations, and active mediations, have been extensively discussed in international literature (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). The evolution of digital parenting reflects a transition from highly restrictive and controlling approaches to more flexible, reflective, and responsive parenting practices. Parents increasingly recognize the need to balance the benefits and risks associated with technology use while supporting children's autonomy and digital development. As observed by Natalie et al. (2024), many parents acknowledge facing constant challenges in making decisions about technology use and maintaining an appropriate balance between protection and empowerment. Likely, the views of Mascheroni et al. (2022) and Symons et al. (2017) also stating that there is no universally accepted definition of digital parenting because parent-child relationships remain dynamic and context-dependent within rapidly changing digital environments. Based on the literature reviewed, digital parenting can be understood as a multidimensional and evolving parenting approach that encompasses supervision, communication, guidance, digital literacy, and collaborative engagement in children's digital activities. Refer to Table 1., summarizing the multidimensional and evolving parenting approach that encompasses supervision, communication, guidance, digital literacy, emotional support, autonomy support, and collaborative engagement in children's digital activities.

Author(s)	Conceptualization of Digital Parenting	Key Elements
Benedetto & Ingrassia (2021)	Digital parenting refers to the efforts, practices, and strategies employed by parents to guide, monitor, support, and regulate children's use of digital technologies.	Guidance, monitoring, support, regulation

Nannatt et al. (2025)	Digital parenting is shaped by two primary dimensions: control (demandingness) and warmth (responsiveness).	Parental control, emotional support, communication.
Tan et al. (2024)	Digital parenting encompasses parental mediation of children's technology use, integration of digital technology into parenting practices, and parental digital competencies.	Parental mediation, technology integration, digital competencies
Zheng et al. (2025)	Digital parenting involves negotiation, collaboration, and shared decision-making between parents and children in managing technology use.	Negotiation, collaboration, family participation
Modecki et al. (2022); Amanda et al. (2024)	Effective digital parenting is based on trust, open communication, and shared learning experiences.	Trust, communication, co-learning
Livingstone & Helsper (2008)	Digital parenting is reflected through mediations strategies such as active mediations, restrictive mediations, and co-use mediations.	Active mediation, restrictive mediation, co-use
Mascheroni et al. (2022); Symons et al. (2017)	There is no universal definition of digital parenting due to the dynamic and evolving nature of parent–child interactions in digital environments.	Evolving concept, contextual parenting
Kirwil (2009); Nikken & Jansz (2014)	Digital parenting includes technical mediation, monitoring, content restrictions, and supervision of online activities.	Technical controls, content filtering, monitoring

Table 1: The Summarize of digital parenting conceptualization in the context of child protection and mental well-being.

Beyond regulating technology use, effective digital parenting plays a crucial role in protecting children from cyber-related risks such as cyberbullying, online grooming, privacy breaches, and digital exploitation. Therefore, digital parenting is conceptualized in this study as a key protective mechanism that contributes to both child protection and mental well-being, providing the foundation for the proposed conceptual framework.

Child Protection

The growing incorporation of digital technologies in children's daily routine has heightened concerns regarding child protection in online environments. Child protection in digital environments refers to policies, practices, and mechanisms designed to ensure children's safety, privacy, well-being, and rights in online spaces. With the rapid evolving of digital technology, children are increasingly exposed to complex risks that may negatively affect their development and overall well-being. According to the Youth Safety and digital wellbeing report, 36 percent of adolescents reported continuous online contact with peers, while 34 percent engaged in daily gaming activities. According to Stanford Center report on Digital Health (2025), 16 percent experienced cyberbullying, 12 percent reported cyberbullying and others, and 11 percent demonstrated problematic social media use. These findings indicate that while digital tools and platforms offer numerous opportunities for communication and learning, they might place adolescents to significant cyber-social risks that may affect their psychological well-being and social development. In the same report, existing evidence suggests that many parents struggle to respond effectively to these threats, not necessarily due to negligence, but because of limited awareness, insufficient digital competencies, and a lack of access to appropriate support and resources.

Furthermore, structural factors such as digital inequality, inadequate platform accountability, and rapidly evolving technologies continue to increase children's vulnerability to online harm. These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive child protection strategies that extend beyond technological solutions and highlight the primary responsibilities of parents as key protectors in younger generations' digital lives. In the context of this paper, effective digital parenting requires more than simply monitoring children's online activities or enforcing restrictions. Rather, it involves fostering open communication, developing children's critical

thinking abilities, and building their capacity to make informed and responsible decisions when engaging with digital technologies. Such approaches not only enhance children's protection from online risks but also contribute to the advancement of digital resilience, self-management, and overall well-being. The UN (2025) further stresses that children should be empowered to navigate digital spaces safely while being protected from cyberbullying, harmful content, online grooming, sexual exploitation, disinformation, and other emerging digital threats.

Existing evidence in UN (2025) also suggests that many parents struggle to respond effectively to these threats, not necessarily due to negligence, but because of limited awareness, insufficient digital competencies, and a lack of access to appropriate support and resources. Furthermore, structural factors such as digital inequality, inadequate platform accountability, and rapidly evolving technologies continue to increase children's vulnerability to online harm. These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive child protection strategies that extend beyond technological solutions and reinforce the importance of parent's responsibilities as key protectors in children's digital lives. In the context of this paper, effective digital parenting requires more than simply monitoring children's online activities or enforcing restrictions. Rather, it involves fostering open communication, developing children's critical thinking abilities, and building their capacity to make informed and responsible decisions when engaging with digital technologies. Such approaches not only enhance children's protection from online risks but also contribute to the development of digital resilience, self-regulation, and overall well-being. The UN (2025) further stresses that children should be empowered to navigate digital spaces safely while being protected from cyberbullying, harmful content, online grooming, sexual exploitation, disinformation, and other emerging digital threats.

Parents who perceive these digital threats as severe and believe that their children are easily exposed to various cyber risks and online discomforts. Such behaviors may include monitoring online activities, establishing rules and boundaries regarding technology use, utilizing parental control tools, maintaining open communication about online safety, and providing guidance on responsible digital behavior (Rogers, 1975). Consequently, parental digital literacy, risk awareness, and prior experience with digital technologies strengthen both threat and coping mechanisms, thereby increasing parents' motivation to implement protective actions. Therefore, Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) introduced by Rogers (1975), explain how individuals are motivated to adopt protective behaviors in response to perceived health threats. PMT proposes that parents' responses to cyber-related risks are shaped by their knowledge and experience, which influence two cognitive appraisal processes: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal refers to parents' judgements of the severity of a harmfulness (perceived severity) and the possibility that their children may experience that threat (perceived vulnerability). Coping appraisal, on the other hand, concerns parents' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of protective measures (response efficacy) and their confidence in their ability to implement such measures successfully (self-efficacy). In the context of children's online safety, PMT draws an effective framework for understanding how parents respond to cyber-related risks such as cyberbullying, online grooming, digital exploitation, privacy breaches, and exposure to harmful content (Refer to figure 1).

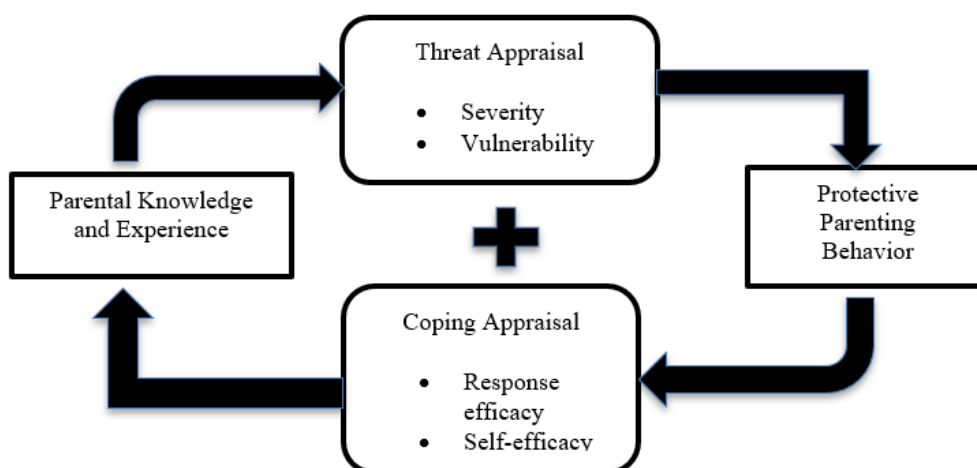


Figure 1: Adapted Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) model for online child protection

However, the effectiveness of these protective actions depends largely on parents' knowledge, competencies, and confidence in managing digital risks. Consequently, child protection in digital environments requires parents to move beyond restrictive supervision and adopt more proactive approaches that emphasize communication, guidance, digital literacy, and the development of children's digital resilience. Through such protective behaviors, digital parenting serves as an important mechanism for reducing children's exposure to digital dangers while promoting safer and healthier digital engagement. The importance of child protection in digital environments is further reinforced by global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), which recognizes the fundamental rights of children in safety, personal privacy, education, and also the access to information (United Nations, 1989).

Additionally, General Comment No. 25 (2021) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child extends these rights to digital environments by emphasizing the need to protect children from digital threats or digital crimes while promoting their meaningful participation in digital spaces. In response to the growing challenges associated with digital technologies, international organizations such as UNICEF (2024) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2020) have advocated a shared-responsibility approach involving governments, technology providers, educational institutions, communities, and parents in creating safer online environments for children. These initiatives highlight that effective child protection requires not only regulatory measures and technological safeguards but also active parental involvement in promoting children's digital safety and positive digital experiences.

Digitalization and Mental Well-being

Mental well-being is increasingly recognized as a core aspect of children's healthy development which aligns with the overall quality of life. The relationship between digitalization and mental well-being has become increasingly interconnected in contemporary society. According to Keyes (2002), mental well-being comprises both hedonic well-being, which refers to happiness, positive emotions, and life satisfaction, and eudaimonic well-being, which involves personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, and positive relationships with others. It extends beyond the absence of mental illness and encompasses individuals' ability to realize their potential, cope effectively with everyday challenges, maintain positive relationships, and contribute meaningfully to society. Within the context of childhood and adolescence, mental well-being includes emotional stability, positive self-esteem, resilience, life satisfaction, social connectedness, and the capacity to regulate emotions and behaviors effectively.

Ramtanen et al. (2021) argued that emotional and psychological supports are becoming progressively digitalized, making digital access and competencies essential for obtaining psychological support and well-being resources. However, young people experiencing poor mental health may face a greater risk of digital exclusion, which can subsequently contribute to broader forms of social exclusion. This suggests that mental well-being and digitalization are closely intertwined, as children's ability to participate safely and meaningfully in digital environments can influence their access to information, social support, educational opportunities, and mental health services. Consequently, discussions of children's positive involvement in the digital era must consider both the opportunities and challenges associated with digital engagement, highlighting the importance of supportive digital environments and effective digital parenting practices in promoting positive psychological outcomes (Nikken & Schols, 2015).

Concerns regarding children's mental well-being have become more significant over the past recent years. Xie et al. (2020) reported that among 2,330 primary school students in Hubei Province, China, 22.6 percentage experienced symptoms of depression and 18.9 percentage reported symptoms of anxiety. Although the study did not determine the specific causes of these conditions, the findings highlight the vulnerability of children to psychological distress and the need for protective factors that can support their well-being (Xie et al. 2020). In this regard, effective child protection and positive digital parenting practices may serve as important mechanisms for reducing children's exposure to harmful experiences and fostering healthier emotional and psychological outcomes. Gupta (2025) also argued that prolonged participation in online activities may be associated with adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes, including increased risks of depression, social isolation, and reduced physical activity. The risks and harms that children encounter in offline environments can often be

extended, intensified, and amplified within digital spaces, making already vulnerable children even more susceptible to adverse outcomes (Collier, 2021). Collectively, these findings highlight the multifaceted associations between online environments and children's developmental outcomes, emphasizing the need for effective protective mechanisms which strengthen children's digital resilience.

Escortell et al. (2023) argues that promoting children's self-esteem and personal development may contribute not only to child protection but also to improved mental well-being in digital environments. A longitudinal study conducted across Canada, the United States, and several European countries found no significant association between the engagements with digital tools. These findings challenge the widely held assumption that increased digital technology use inevitably leads to negative psychological well-being among children and adolescents. Instead, they suggest that the impact of digital technologies may depend on factors such as the nature of online activities, the context of use, personal characteristics, and the level of parental support (Escortell et al., 2023). The evolving incorporation of digital technologies into children's everyday routines has transformed the way well-being is experienced and expressed in contemporary society. Consequently, examining children's mental well-being in the digital age requires a broader perspective that considers not only the risks associated with technology use but also the opportunities it provides for personal growth, learning, and social connection.

This perspective aligns with the PERMA framework, which was informed by Seligman's (2011). This framework conceptualizes well-being by using five interrelated components (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments). Early studies on well-being primarily conceptualized it as a unidimensional construct measured through life satisfaction. However, the development of the PERMA framework expanded this perspective by introducing a multidimensional understanding of well-being that encompasses a broader range of positive experiences, psychological resources, and human functioning (Lee & Yoo 2025). Recent studies have extended the PERMA framework to digital and immersive environments, suggesting that technology can influence well-being through opportunities for social connection, learning, engagement, personal achievement, and meaningful participation. Within digital environments, children's experiences may contribute positively or negatively to these well-being dimensions depending on the nature of their online interactions and the level of support and protection available to them.

Consequently, effective digital parenting and child protection practices play an important role in ensuring that children's digital experiences contribute to positive mental well-being outcomes. Although the PERMA framework has been widely applied to understand well-being across various contexts, its application within digital environments remains relatively limited. Previous studies have extended the PERMA framework to areas such as environmental design (Song et al., 2025) and off-site working experience using extensive consumer's information (Chevtaeva et al., 2023). However, these studies neither specifically give importance on PERMA within highly engaging technology nor form scales that suited to such inputs. To address this gap, Kim and Yap (2025) highlighted the evolving nature of well-being within digital environments and emphasized the need to reconsider traditional well-being constructs considering emerging technological. The same study concluded, there is a strong requirement for a PERMA to understand how digital space shape children's mental well-being and how protective factors such as digital parenting and child protection can contribute to positive outcomes (Refer to figure 2).

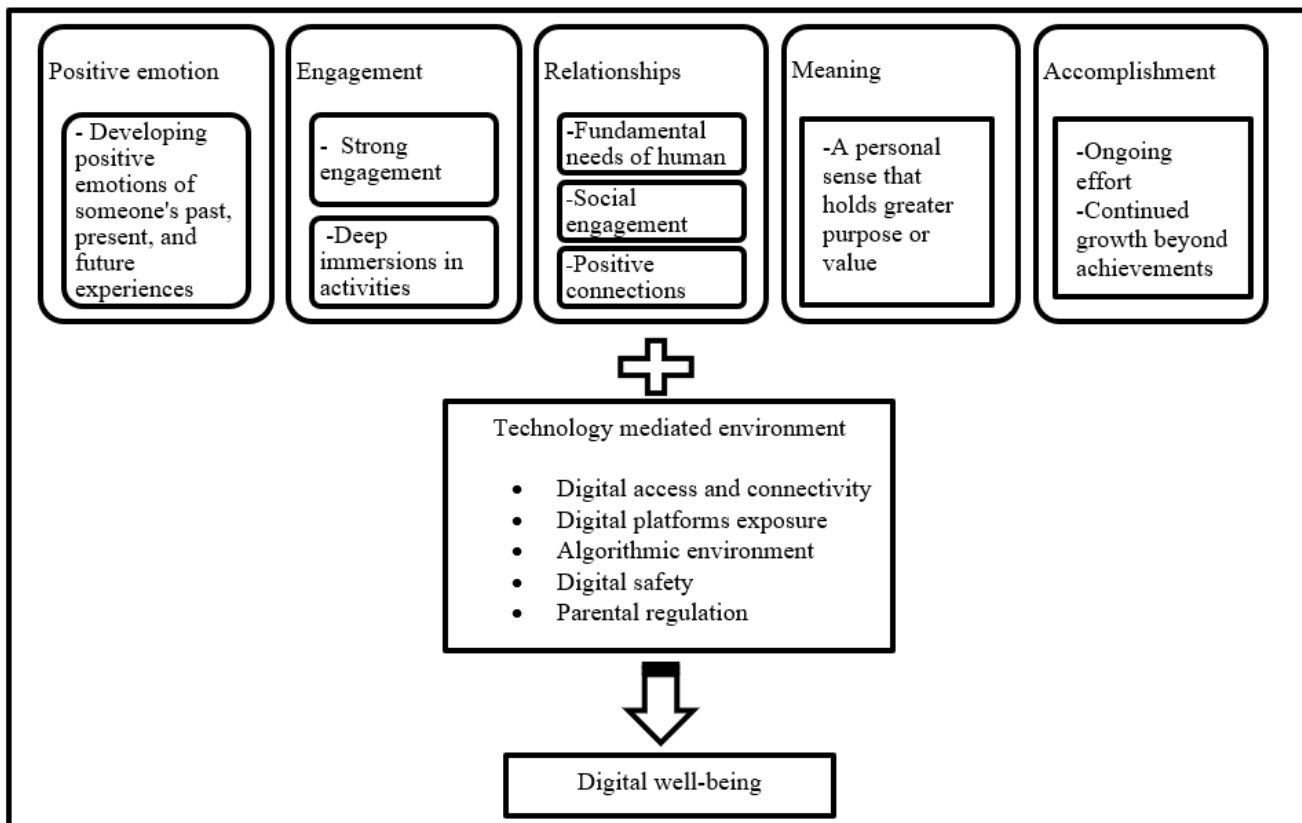


Figure 2: Adapted PERMA framework from Kim and Yap (2025)

Therefore, as suggested in Figure 2 above, this study suggests that children's positive digital experiences and the level of protection they receive promotes enjoyment, active participation, meaningful social relationships, personal growth, and achievement, thereby enhancing children's mental well-being.

THEORITICAL IMPLICATION

This study contributes to literature by linking three research domains that are often studied independently: digital parenting, child protection, and children's mental well-being. While previous studies have mainly focused on parental mediation strategies, online safety, or psychological well-being separately, the present paper proposes that these constructs operate as interconnected processes. Specifically, effective digital parenting may strengthen child protection practices, which subsequently create safer digital experiences that support children's mental well-being. Furthermore, the paper broadens the conceptual understanding of digital parenting beyond traditional parental monitoring and restrictive mediation (Baumrind, 1968; Broderick, 1993). The reviewed literature suggests that effective digital parenting encompasses multiple dimensions, including communication, emotional support, guidance, digital literacy, supervision, and collaborative engagement (Amanda et al. 2025; Barner & Potter, 2020). These dimensions collectively strengthen children's protection from cyber-social risks while simultaneously fostering resilience and healthy digital experiences. However, limited attention has been given to understanding how these domains interact within a single conceptual framework. By synthesizing these perspectives, the present paper proposes that digital parenting serves as a foundational protective mechanism that influences the extent to which children are protected from cyber-social risks and subsequently experience positive mental well-being outcomes.

Furthermore, this paper contributes theoretically by positioning child protection as a central mechanism linking digital parenting and mental well-being. Although child protection is frequently discussed as an outcome of parental involvement, the reviewed literature indicates that effective protection from cyber-social risks may also create conditions that support children's emotional stability, resilience, self-esteem, and overall psychological well-being. The paper also demonstrates the complementary relevance of PMT by Rogers (1975) in understanding children's experiences in digital environments. PMT explains how parents assess cyber-related

threats and engage in protective behaviors to safeguard their children. Rather than focusing solely on children's responses to online risks, the framework highlights how parental threat and coping evaluations influence the adoption of proactive digital parenting practices. Such practices may include active mediation, open communication, online monitoring, digital literacy guidance, and the establishment of appropriate digital boundaries. In this regard, child protection is conceptualized not merely as the prevention of harm but as an enabling condition that allows children to engage safely and confidently in digital environments. This perspective broadens existing discussions of online safety by highlighting its significance in supporting positive developmental outcomes (Collier, 2021).

This study also adds to the expanding of literature on children's mental well-being by extending the application of Seligman's PERMA framework within digital environments. Traditionally, the PERMA model has been widely used to explain human flourishing through five dimensions such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Kim & Yap, 2025). However, much of the existing research has examined these dimensions within educational, organizational, and psychological contexts, while comparatively less attention has been given to understanding how these components operate within children's everyday digital experiences. The present paper suggests that children's mental well-being in the digital era should not be understood solely in terms of the absence of psychological distress or exposure to online risks. Rather, digital environments can serve as important spaces through which children experience enjoyment, build social relationships, engage in meaningful activities, develop competencies, and achieve personal accomplishments. From this perspective, digital technologies are not inherently harmful or beneficial; instead, their effects on children's well-being depend on the quality of children's digital experiences and the support systems surrounding them. Therefore, PERMA framework provides valuable theoretical lens for understanding both the opportunities and challenges that online environments present for children's development and well-being (Kim & Yap, 2025).

In conclusion, this paper provides a more holistic understanding of how parental practice can influence both children's safety and psychological outcomes in an increasingly digital society. Finally, the paper highlights the significance of viewing digital parenting as a protective and growth process rather than merely a mechanism of control. This perspective contributes to future theoretical developments by encouraging researchers to examine the pathways through which digital parenting promotes child protection and positive well-being outcomes within contemporary technology-mediated environments. In turn, effective child protection creates a secure and more encouraging online environment that allows children to develop confidence, resilience, and positive digital experiences. These positive experiences may subsequently contribute to various dimensions of mental well-being, including emotional stability, social connectedness, personal growth, and overall psychological functioning.

Practical And Policy Implications

This conceptual paper provides several practical and policy implications for parents, educators, policymakers, and technology providers in promoting safer digital environments and positive well-being. As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into children's daily lives, a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders is necessary to ensure that children can gain from online opportunities while minimizing exposure to cyber-social risks (Galpin et al. 2023). The findings highlight the importance of strengthening digital parenting practices among parents and caregivers. Parents should adopt active mediation strategies such as co-viewing digital content, exploring online experiences and establishing family technology agreements. Shared digital experiences allow parents to better understand their children's online environments while simultaneously providing opportunities for direct guidance, supervision, and relationship-building (Barnes & Potter, 2020). Parents also should adopt balanced approaches to technology use by establishing appropriate screen-time boundaries while ensuring children have sufficient opportunities to participate in physical, educational, and social activities.

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines, which have subsequently been adopted by countries such as Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand as well as the World Health Organization, emphasize the importance of balancing screen time with adequate physical activity and sleep (Zgambo et al., 2025). Excessive reliance on digital technologies may limit opportunities for face-to-face interactions, recreational activities, and healthy

lifestyle practices. Furthermore, parents may utilize digital monitoring applications and parental monitoring tools to support children's online safety. In example, utilizing parental control applications such as Microsoft Family Safety, Apple Screen Time and Google Family Link (Syukur et al., 2024). These approaches may help children develop digital resilience while reducing exposure to cyber-social risks. However, these technologies should be viewed as complementary tools rather than substitutes for parental engagement. Monitoring practices should be implemented transparently and accompanied by open discussions so that children understand the rationale behind digital safety measures and develop a sense of shared responsibility in managing their online behaviors.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa) in June 2020 as a national digital learning platform designed to support teaching and learning through a comprehensive learning management system and a wide range of educational resources for teachers and students. One of the key applications integrated into DELIMa is Google Classroom, which facilitates online teaching, learning, communication, and assessment activities. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 rapidly increased the implementations of digital systems in education, leading schools across Malaysia to transition from conventional face-to-face instruction to online learning modalities (Mahlan & Hamat, 2020; Rina Devi, 2021; Bakialekshmi, 2025). According to Yaacob et al. (2023), schools should strengthen the implementation of digital citizenship and cyber-safety education through existing initiatives such as (DELIMa) and digital literacy programmes. These initiatives can be expanded to include modules on cyberbullying prevention, online grooming awareness, privacy management, and responsible social media use.

Nicolaidou and Venizelou (2020) highlighted those global initiatives such as Safer Internet Day, has been celebrated in more than 160 countries since 2004 to encourage responsible engagement of digital tools among younger generations. Research in the same article, evaluating the learning programme "*Be Smart When Online!*" reported significant improvements in children's e-safety skills, particularly in relation to protecting personal information, preventing cyberbullying, and avoiding online threats. Educational institutions should integrate structured digital citizenship modules covering cyberbullying prevention, online privacy management, misinformation detection, digital footprints, and responsible social media engagement (Supramaniam, 2024). Programmes such as Common-Sense Education's Digital Citizenship Curriculum and Google's Be Internet Awesome initiative provide examples of evidence-based approaches that can be adapted across educational settings (Nicolaidou & Venizelou, 2020).

According to United Nations (1989), policymakers should strengthen child online protection mechanisms through comprehensive regulatory frameworks, online safety standards, age-appropriate digital services, and mandatory reporting procedures for online exploitation. International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provide policy guidance for safeguarding children's rights within digital environments. UN also emphasized on The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and General Comment No. 25 on Children's Rights in relation to the Digital Environment provide important guidance for protecting children's privacy rights, security, education, participation, and protection from online exploitation. These frameworks may be particularly valuable for developing and lower-income countries where child online protection policies remain fragmented or underdeveloped. Integrating such principles into national digital education, child protection, and cybersecurity policies can strengthen institutional responses to cyberbullying, online grooming, digital exploitation, privacy violations, and other emerging cyber-social risks.

Countries like Malaysia also support the objectives of UNCRC which outlined in Malaysia's National Cyber Security Strategy (2025–2030) and Safer Internet initiatives that emphasize digital resilience and online safety among children (NASCA, 2025). Policymakers should introduce a national Digital Parenting Framework that provides parents with clear guidance on parental mediation, screen management, online risk prevention, and digital literacy. Like Australia's eSafety Commissioner programme and Singapore's Digital for Life Movement, Malaysia could establish nationwide awareness campaigns specifically focusing on cyber-parenting competencies and child online protection (Zgambo et al. 2025). All these policy implications are consistent with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which seeks to eliminate the child abuse, human trafficking, exploitation and child violence. Governments should invest in nationwide digital literacy programmes, child online protection initiatives, and family-oriented digital parenting interventions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the paper is conceptual in nature and does not provide empirical evidence to validate the proposed relationships among digital parenting, child protection, and mental well-being. The proposed framework is primarily developed through the synthesis of existing literature and theoretical perspectives, particularly Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and the PERMA framework. Therefore, future studies are recommended to empirically test the anticipated relationships using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches. Second, the study adopts a broad perspective on digital parenting and does not differentiate the effectiveness of specific parenting strategies, such as active mediation, restrictive mediation, co-use mediation, monitoring, and digital literacy practices. Future research could examine the relative influence of these dimensions on child protection outcomes and mental well-being in different digital contexts. Third, the conceptual framework does not explicitly account for contextual factors that may influence children's digital experiences. Variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic background, cultural values, family structure, digital access, and parental digital competencies may shape both the effectiveness of digital parenting and children's vulnerability to online risks.

Future studies should investigate the moderating and mediating roles of these factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of children's digital well-being. Fourth, while the study emphasizes the role of parents as a primary protective mechanism, child protection in digital environments is a shared responsibility involving schools, technology companies, communities, policymakers, and regulatory agencies. Future research should adopt multi-stakeholder perspectives to explore how collaborative approaches can strengthen children's security and well-being in online platforms. Finally, the rapid evolution of digital technologies, including AI, immersive technologies, and algorithm-driven platforms, continues to reshape children's online experiences. Future studies should examine how emerging technologies influence child protection and mental well-being, as well as the competencies parents require to effectively support children in increasingly complex digital ecosystems. In conclusion, future research should validate and refine the proposed framework across different populations, cultural contexts, and technological environments. Such efforts will contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital parenting can enhance child protection and promote positive mental well-being among children in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of digital technologies has reshaped the ways in which children acquire knowledge, communicate, socialize, and engage with the world around them. While digital environments offer significant opportunities for education, innovative and social engagement, they also expose children to a wide range of cyber-related risks, including cyberbullying, online grooming, digital exploitation, privacy violations, and harmful online content. These challenges highlight the growing importance of digital parenting as a proactive approach to safeguarding children in increasingly technology-mediated environments. Drawing PMT and the PERMA framework, this conceptual paper proposes that digital parenting serves as a critical protective mechanism that enhances child protection and supports children's mental well-being. Through strategies such as monitoring, communication, guidance, parental mediation, and digital literacy development, parents can help children navigate digital environments safely and responsibly. Effective child protection not only decreases children's exposure to online threats but also fosters positive emotions, engagement, meaningful relationships, accomplishment, and resilience, which are essential components of mental well-being. By fostering positive digital experiences while minimizing online risks, digital parenting can contribute to significant role in enhancing child protection and promoting children's mental well-being in the digital era.

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