

Parental Involvement in Regulating Digital Media Usage Among Selected Senior Secondary School Students in Gombe Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed adolescents' learning, communication, and social interactions. While digital media provides educational and social opportunities, excessive and unregulated use exposes adolescents to risks such as cyberbullying, online harassment, poor academic performance, and excessive screen time. Parents play a critical role in guiding and regulating their children's digital media use; however, evidence on parental involvement in the Nigerian context remains limited. This study examined parental involvement in regulating digital media use among senior secondary school students in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study involved 310 senior secondary school students selected from public secondary schools in Gombe Metropolis using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings revealed that most students reported a moderate level of parental involvement in regulating their digital media use. The study further found a statistically significant moderate negative relationship between parental involvement and digital media use, indicating that increased parental involvement was associated with lower levels of digital media use among students. The findings also showed that although parental regulation promotes responsible online behaviour and protects adolescents from online risks, parents experience challenges such as limited digital literacy, inadequate monitoring skills, and peer influence on adolescents. The study concludes that effective parental involvement is essential for promoting responsible digital media use among adolescents. It recommends that parents, schools, and policymakers collaborate to strengthen digital literacy and establish effective strategies for guiding adolescents' online behaviour.

Keywords: Parental involvement, digital media use, adolescents, secondary school students, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media has become an indispensable component of contemporary society, influencing communication, education, entertainment, and social interaction. The increasing accessibility of smartphones, social networking platforms, and internet-enabled devices has significantly transformed the daily experiences of adolescents. Secondary school students now rely extensively on digital technologies for learning, communication, recreation, and information sharing. Although these technologies provide numerous educational and developmental opportunities, their excessive and uncontrolled use has generated growing concern among educators, parents, and policymakers (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2021).

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of excessive digital media use because of their developmental stage and increasing independence. Research has linked excessive digital media use with poor academic achievement, reduced physical activity, sleep disturbances, cyberbullying, online victimization, and mental health challenges. Consequently, effective parental involvement has become increasingly important in helping adolescents develop responsible digital habits while minimizing exposure to online risks.

World Health Organization [WHO], 2023; Odgers & Jensen, 2022). Parental involvement extends beyond restricting screen time. It includes monitoring online activities, discussing internet safety, establishing appropriate rules, modelling responsible technology use, and providing guidance that enables adolescents to make informed decisions in digital environments. Such involvement encourages responsible online behaviour while allowing adolescents to benefit from the educational and social opportunities offered by digital technologies.

In Nigeria, increasing internet penetration and smartphone ownership have contributed to rapid growth in adolescent digital media use. However, many parents face challenges in supervising their children (Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), 2024, Oguine et al 2025).

Ojedokun (2017) found that there is a growing concern about the impact of digital media on adolescents' social, emotional, and cognitive development. the study also revealed that many Nigerian adolescents are exposed to online risks, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, and that parental involvement is crucial in mitigating these risks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Digital Media Use

Digital media refers to internet-enabled technologies and electronic platforms that facilitate the creation, sharing, storage, and exchange of information through devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and other digital technologies. Among adolescents, digital media encompasses social networking sites, instant messaging applications, online gaming, educational websites, video-sharing platforms, podcasts, blogs, and virtual learning environments. The increasing accessibility of these technologies has transformed the educational and social experiences of secondary school students (UNESCO, 2023).

Digital media has become an essential educational resource by providing access to online learning materials, virtual classrooms, collaborative learning platforms, and digital libraries. Beyond education, it enables adolescents to maintain social relationships, develop communication skills, and access information quickly. Nevertheless, excessive or unsupervised digital media use has been associated with numerous adverse outcomes, including excessive screen time, cyberbullying, online harassment, exposure to inappropriate content, sleep disruption, reduced academic engagement, and psychological distress (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2021).

Rapee et al (2024) suggests that the effects of digital media depend largely on the quality, duration, and purpose of its use, as well as the extent of parental guidance and supervision. Consequently, researchers increasingly emphasize balanced and responsible digital engagement rather than complete restriction.

Parental Involvement in Digital Media Regulation

Parental involvement refers to the active participation of parents in monitoring, guiding, supervising, and supporting their children's academic, social, and behavioural development. Within the context of digital media, parental involvement includes establishing rules regarding screen time, monitoring online activities, discussing internet safety, using parental control technologies, modelling responsible digital behaviour, and maintaining open communication about online experiences (Livingstone et al., 2022).

Adigwe and Van der Walt (2024) found that restrictive mediation was negatively associated with adolescents' online media activities, while active mediation was positively associated with online activities. Parents who combine supervision with supportive communication are generally more successful in encouraging healthy digital habits than those who rely solely on restrictive control Geurts et al., 2023; Fam et al 2023).

Effective parental regulation extends beyond limiting access to digital devices. It requires continuous communication, trust-building, digital literacy, and collaboration between parents and children. Adolescents whose parents actively engage in discussions about online behaviour often demonstrate greater awareness of internet safety and more responsible digital practices (OECD, 2021).

Opesade (2022) found that none of the parental mediation strategies significantly reduced adolescents' Internet-risk exposure in Oyo State, Nigeria. More recently, La'aro, Adeyemo, and Omoloso (2026) found that restrictive and technical mediation constituted the dominant strategies among parents of secondary-school students in Lagos State, Nigeria. While active, discussion-based mediation was less consistently employed. These mixed findings suggest that the effectiveness of parental involvement may depend on the type of mediation adopted, parents' digital competence and the characteristics of adolescents' digital-media use.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in digital media regulation offers several educational and developmental benefits. It promotes responsible online behaviour, reduces exposure to cyberbullying and harmful online content, encourages balanced screen time, improves academic concentration, and strengthens parent-child relationships. Regular parental guidance also enables adolescents to develop digital literacy skills that support safe and productive engagement with technology (UNESCO, 2023).

Furthermore, collaborative parental mediation—where parents discuss digital experiences with their children instead of relying exclusively on restrictions—has been associated with higher levels of self-regulation, critical thinking, and responsible decision-making in online environments American Psychological Association. (2023).

Challenges of Parental Involvement

Despite its importance, effective parental involvement faces several challenges. Adolescents frequently demonstrate greater technological competence than their parents, making supervision more difficult (UNICEF, 2021). Sumit (2025) Parental “phubbing”: Adults struggling with their own screen time or ignoring children in favor of devices make it harder to enforce household boundaries or act as credible role models.

Generational Conflict: Overly restrictive or inconsistent rule-setting can backfire, driving children toward secretive online behaviors or heightened emotional distress. Eroding Interaction Depth: While digital tools increase the sheer frequency of family contact, they often reduce deep, meaningful emotional connections during shared time. Rapid Device Evolution: Managing newer tools like smartwatches, virtual reality, and smart speakers introduces complex stressors that standard TV or computer rules cannot fix.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate parental involvement in regulating digital media use among senior secondary school students in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to collect data from a representative sample of respondents and describe existing patterns of parental involvement and digital media use without manipulating any study variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State, Nigeria. The metropolis comprises several public and private secondary schools with increasing access to smartphones, internet services, and other digital technologies.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised 2,600 senior secondary school students enrolled in five selected public secondary schools in Gombe Metropolis together with their parents or guardians. These schools included Government Day Secondary School (GDSS) Gandu, Government Day Secondary School (GDSS) Pilot,

Government Day Secondary School (GDSS) Pantami, and other selected public senior secondary schools within the metropolis.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 333 respondents was determined using the Research Advisors (2006) Sample Size Determination Table. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, schools were stratified according to location. Selected schools were chosen purposively to ensure adequate representation of the study area. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to select eligible respondents from each participating school. Although 333 questionnaires were administered, 333 completed questionnaires were found valid and used for the final data analysis. This accounted for the sample used in testing the study hypothesis.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers after reviewing relevant literature on parental involvement and adolescent digital media use. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A elicited respondents' demographic information, while Section B measured parental involvement in digital media regulation, students' digital media use, and the perceived benefits and challenges of parental involvement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation from Gombe State University and the University of Jos. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the instrument in measuring the study variables.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency for research purposes. In addition, a test-retest procedure produced a correlation coefficient of 0.70, confirming the stability of the instrument over time.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researchers obtained permission from the selected school authorities before administering the questionnaire. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were administered personally with the assistance of trained research assistants and retrieved immediately after completion to maximize the response rate.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from respondents and school authorities, confidentiality of participants' responses was guaranteed, and the information collected was used solely for academic purposes. No identifying information was disclosed in the reporting of findings.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to answer the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the

hypothesis on the relationship between parental involvement and digital media use. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Level of Parental Involvement in Regulating Digital Media Use.

The analysis showed that 25% of the respondents reported a low level of parental involvement, 40% reported a moderate level, while 35% indicated a high level of parental involvement in regulating their digital media use. These findings suggest that most parents in Gombe Metropolis demonstrate at least a moderate level of engagement in monitoring and guiding their children's digital media activities. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents reporting low parental involvement indicates that a considerable number of adolescents may still be exposed to the risks associated with inadequate parental supervision.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and digital media use among senior secondary school students in Gombe Metropolis.

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate negative relationship between parental involvement and digital media use ($r = -0.462$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This finding indicates that increased parental involvement is associated with lower levels of digital media use among senior secondary school students.

Research Question 2: Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Parental Involvement

The findings indicate that respondents perceived several challenges affecting effective parental regulation of digital media use. These include adolescents possessing greater technical skills than their parents, parents' occupational commitments limiting supervision, shared use of digital devices within households, and peer influence encouraging continued online engagement. The overall mean score suggests that these factors constitute substantial barriers to effective parental regulation of adolescents' digital media use.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that parental involvement remains an important factor in shaping adolescents' digital media behaviour. The predominance of moderate and high parental involvement suggests that many parents are making conscious efforts to regulate their children's online activities. Such involvement may include monitoring screen time, discuss online safety, and establish rules governing digital media use. The present findings agree with those of Livingstone et al. (2022), who reported that active parental mediation reduces adolescents' risky online behaviour. In the contrary, Modecki et al (2022) argued that the effectiveness of digital parenting cannot be explained solely by parents' digital monitoring. Family relationship, adolescent autonomy, positive technology use and broader social contexts also shape online behaviour.

The statistically significant negative relationship between parental involvement and digital media use indicates that increased parental supervision is associated with reduced digital media engagement among adolescents. This finding supports the view that active parental guidance can contribute to healthier technology-use habits and reduce excessive screen exposure. The findings are also consistent with WHO (2023), which emphasizes the importance of parental guidance in promoting healthy digital habits.

The study also identified several barriers to effective parental regulation. These include parents limited digital literacy, occupational demands, shared access to digital devices, and peer influence. These challenges suggest that successful digital parenting requires not only parental commitment but also improved digital competence and collaboration between families, schools, and relevant stakeholders. This finding is consistent with Morawska et al. (2026), who reported that parents' digital competence, communication skills, and monitoring

practices significantly influence adolescents' online behaviour. Likewise, Punjani et al. (2026) found that technological disparities, limited parental knowledge, inadequate communication, and insufficient institutional support constrain effective digital parenting. Similarly, Sipiläinen et al. (2026) observed that parents with lower digital competence were less likely to engage effectively in digital parenting, while Tan et al. (2024) concluded that parents' technological skills and attitudes are important predictors of successful digital parenting.

CONCLUSION

This study examined parental involvement in regulating digital media use among senior secondary school students in Gombe Metropolis. The findings revealed that parental involvement was generally moderate to high and that greater parental involvement was significantly associated with lower levels of digital media use among adolescents. Although parental regulation contributes to safer and more responsible digital behaviour, parents continue to encounter challenges related to digital literacy, time constraints, and adolescents' increasing technological competence. The study concludes that strengthening parental involvement remains an important strategy for promoting responsible digital media use among secondary school students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Parents should establish clear and age-appropriate rules regarding digital media use while maintaining open communication with their children about online experiences.
- Schools should organize regular digital literacy programmed for parents and students to enhance awareness of responsible digital media use, online safety, and cyberbullying prevention.
- Educational authorities should integrate digital citizenship and responsible technology use into the secondary school curriculum.
- Government and relevant educational agencies should establish digital literacy programmes specifically designed for parents, while schools and communities should develop collaborative digital-safety monitoring initiatives to strengthen parents' capacity to regulate students' digital media use.

Future studies should include participants from other states and geopolitical zones to improve the generalizability of findings and provide broader evidence on parental involvement in adolescent digital media use in Nigeria.

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