

Investigating Parental Involvement In Alpha Generation's Digital Activities

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Abstract

The alpha generation is the children born during 2010-2025. This generation is also called Digital Native. The kids born during this period are more oriented towards digital gadgets. The technological devices are part and parcel of their lives. However, it is important to remember that these devices are not always suitable for them but often prove otherwise. Consequently, the children should be supervised keenly to control their excessive engagement with digital devices. Contextually, this qualitative study was conducted in Balochistan, Pakistan, where data was collected from the parents of Gen Alpha. The study outlined that digital devices are more attractive to the kids of the alpha generation. Owing to their interactive and entertaining mode, children can never refrain from using these gadgets; however, frequent and vigilant surveillance by parents can control them from excessive use. The study further suggests that parents should attach their kids to themselves, engage them in academic activities, sports, and outdoor games and be explicitly aware of the harmful consequences of excessive use of digital devices.

Key Words: Alpha Generation, Children, Digital Gadgets, Mobile, Parents

Introduction

After ending the English alphabet with Z for generations like X, Y, and Z, the succeeding generation needed to be named another way; the confusion and questions about a new title were settled down by Australian demographer Mark McCrindle and his team who designated those who were born between 2010 and 2025 as the Generation Alpha, after surveying in 2005 (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014; Nagy & Kolcsey, 2017). The generation is also called Digital Babies (Friedrich, 2021). The term alpha was used because of the first letter of the Greek alphabet, which marks the beginning of a new generation cycle (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014; Reis et al., 2018; Tootell et al., 2014). It is argued that this generation is a Digital Native because they are "Native Speakers" of the digital language of computers, the internet and video games. Bonnet argues that Digital Natives are more accustomed to modern knowledge and information technology (IT) skills, which resultantly discriminate them from the earlier generations (Tootell et al., 2014). The members of this generation are the most educated owing to their access and learning through online sources. The members are more materialistic (Holroyd, 2011; Ramadan et al., 2017). This generational cohort has very easy access to touch

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screens and display screens. The members of Gen Alpha have a very progressive and transformative nature, which consequently boosts their critical capabilities. This cohort is growing up in an increasingly horizontal world. (Papinhas, 2013; Reis et al, 2018). It is further asserted that change is so fast in this era that the generational gap has shrunk from 20 to 25 years to 15 years. Alpha generation has more opportunities than challenges. (Schawbel, 2014). They are more exposed to marketing, technology, travelling, and trends than their parents or millennials (Gen Y), which, as a result, influences their worldview more than the previous generation. (Amrit, 2020). The birth of this generation is ironically marked in the year when the word “app” was declared, so, consequently, this generational cohort will be highly netted through app-based movies, more screen time, and less social attention span, which produces a lack of social formation. (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020; Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2021).

Generation Alpha, who was born in the digital era, is more interested in digital technology. They are using mobile gadgets and other technological sources frequently. A study reports that in 2022, 33.44% of the early childhood population use wireless gadgets like mobiles, tablets, etc. Among these, 25.5% are children aged 0-4 years or toddlers, 52.76% are children aged 5-6 years and numbers, who can access the internet, and 24.95% are aged 5-6 years or above. (Nurdahlia, 2023). The study further communicates that data from KPAI demonstrates that 98% of children aged 6-12 years have access to technological devices. They use an average of 6 hours and 45 minutes per day to watch social media, play video games, play games and use game applications. Subsequently, it indicates that the alpha generation is more interested in technological tools. This engagement with technological gadgets may have positive and negative impacts on children. Negatively, it causes behavioural discomfort like having difficulty setting a bedtime, remaining angry always, and experiencing anxiety, which starts with fear. However, it increases creativity positively when parents are assistive especially (Nurdahlia, 2023). Gen Alpha is soon becoming adolescents and young adults. This generation's frequent attachment to digital technology has influenced their cognitive processes and identity construction since their immature age. This generation will be pretty different from the earlier one because of the high technological evolution, which needs specific skills and features, culminating in amazing teaching, learning, working, and consuming outcomes. (Carvalho, Monteiro & Martins, 2022; McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2014; Reis et al, 2018; Tootell, Freeman, & Freeman, 2014).

Review of Literature

In the increasingly technological world, Gen Alpha is gaining more orientation with technological gadgets and computer-based devices than the previous generations (Wood, 2016). These tools are being meaningfully recognized as important tools for learning to help the alpha generation groom their cognitive, societal and learning skills (Aziz et al., 2020; Couse & Chen, 2010; Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015; Mayer, 2020). Owing to this end, several mobile-based applications have been designed to facilitate this generation (Cerezoa et al., 2019; Lopez-Faicán & Jaen, 2020). Carson et al. (2013) concluded that children aged 2-4 years spent 8.40 minutes per day on screen on average. Similarly, Kabali et al. (2015), in their study regarding parents letting their children use mobiles, indicated that 60% of parents provide mobiles to their children while running shops. Additionally, 73% of parents let their children use mobile while doing chores at home. Moreover, 65% of parents found that their children could use mobile media alone (Holloway et al., 2013). Early interaction with computers is a worldwide phenomenon, where children of 3-4 years engage with computers (Holloway et al., 2013; Wood, 2016). Academically, this generation reads in schools; between 50% and 70% of members are still in kindergarten and are proficient at surfing the internet. (Medien & Schulkindern, 2021). Among them, 30% already used tablets at age two (2). They were accustomed to video games (Réz & Nagy, 2023).

Technological gadgets have increased over the last few decades (Hardell, 2018). These devices educate, entertain, communicate and facilitate social interactions. The devices are good enough to support and sharpen mental functions, such as improvement of children's motor and cognitive skills and visual memory (Genc, 2014). However, parental supervision is required to guide their children on how these gadgets could best be used for learning purposes (Espinosa et al., 2006; Wood, 2016). A study conducted by Plowman et al. about parental reports and observations highlights that engagement with mobile gadgets can boost four primary areas of learning: 1) Acquiring operational skills, 2) extending knowledge and understanding of the world, 3) developing dispositions to learning and 4) understanding the role of technology in daily life (Genc, 2014; Plowman et al., 2011).

The engagement of the alpha generation with digital devices has significantly increased with the rapid development of new portable and easily accessible technology, such as smartphones and tablets, etc. Similarly, the introduction of media games, learning packages, and educational applications has dramatically lingered the timing of mobile usage among children. (Strasburger & Hogan, 2013; Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2010; Vandewater et al., 2007). In Japan, the period spent by the alpha generation with digital gadgets has increased dramatically. A survey outlined by the Japan Ministry of Education showed that the average number of children using digital devices for one hour was 15% among elementary school children and 48% among junior high school students (Zenkoku et al., 2014). In the UK, the education policy has encouraged parents to encourage and support their children using such technologies to boost their learning capabilities. The children who used technology showed better language skills, competence, subjective knowledge, and problem-solving skills than those who did not use technology for their learning (Couse & Chen, 2010). The children of the alpha generation use mobile tools for different purposes like playing games, doing school work, messaging with friends, and so on, which, as a result, increasingly replaces the traditional technological tools and nevertheless become an integral part of Gen Alpha's lives. (Vandewater et al, 2007, Vandewater & Lee, 2009). As argued by Hosokawa and Katsura (2018), this excessive media use has shown concerns about the impacts on the health of growing children.

Studies indicate that mobile gadgets, while having constructive impacts on the alpha generation's academic and technical life, have damaging impacts in the context of their usage (Li et al., 2006; Subramanyam, 2011; Tahir & Arif, 2015). Parents arguably show the fear that using smartphones can cause physical and mental impairments, which resultantly can lead children to be introverted and socially isolated and nevertheless will promote familial worrisome for being disengaged with family members (Genc, 2014). Using technology for a long time increases children's social isolation, detaches them from social activities like outdoor games, disturbs their social development, and increases depression and loneliness (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Rikkers et al., 2016; Subrahmanyam et al., 2000). Plowman, McPake and Stephen (2011) in their study argue that sedentary use of technological gadgets by children, like computers, televisions, video games, etc., endangers children's health, which leads ultimately to obesity and technological addiction and increases health risks (Genc, 2014; McPake & Stephen, 2011). Moreover, unchecked use of digital gadgets causes aggression and behavioural problems. Besides this, frequent use of these tools can reduce auditory and visual capacity among alpha-generation children (Réz & Nagy, 2023).

Digital devices are no doubt essential for educational gains and improvement. However, they also adversely affect alpha-generation children's health and social skills (Tahir & Arif, 2015). It was noted that excessive use of digital devices is undoubtedly an issue that must be focused on seriously. The reasons behind this were argued that the skeletal motor and oculomotor systems of human beings were not naturally developed to use such devices (Friedrich, 2021). Contextually, the time is significant, particularly for 6-10 years. In this

regard, the maximum time for screening is 45-60 minutes per day. It is maintained further that unchecked use of technological tools can lead to computer vision syndrome (CVS), which, as a result, disturbs the healthy development of the central nervous system, visual system and psychiatric ability (Friedrich, 2021; Réz & Nagy, 2023). Furthermore, long-term digital device usage may cause myopia among children alarmingly (Németh et al., 2021), which results in a dysfunction of the visual systems, such as abnormal binocular vision that subsequently causes amblyopia in one eye. Moreover, it will increase myopia among people, and it is estimated that the number of people with myopia will rise to five billion by the year 2050 (Chassine et al., 2015; Xiong et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, wireless phones emit radiofrequency (RF) radiation, which generally affects the brain. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) at WHO on May 2011 evaluated the brain tumor risk because of excessive use of wireless gadgets. Accordingly, the scientific panel found that RF radiations from digital devices emitting in the frequency range 30kHz-300GHz are a Group 2B, a “possible” human carcinogen (Hardell, 2018). It is further communicated that besides the above-mentioned diseases, the long-term use of technological devices could enhance the chances of neurological diseases, physiological addiction, psychological abnormalities, sleep disturbance and other behavioural problems (Radesky & Christakis, 2016; Réz & Nagy, 2023). Furthermore, they argue that vertebrae usually support a man who can stand straight while carrying 5 kg in the natural anatomical functioning of the human vertebral column. If his head tilts anteriorly by 158, the weight increases to 12 kg; if his head bows by 308, the load will feel like 18 kg; nevertheless, if he tilts by 458, the load will increase to 22 kg, and if he bows by 608 the load will feel like 27 kg. This amount of weight on the neck would cause different pains in the body, like headaches and muscle unrest, and may induce other degenerative processes in the body.

Barring children of the alpha generation from using smartphones is quite tricky. The children show harsh behaviour by getting angry and shouting often. Evidently, without using digital technology, the kid of Gen Alpha may lag behind. Parents, for being good companions, have the highest responsibility to become therapists for the addicted alpha generation and properly guide them about the positive use of digital devices. Give them a company to get educational shows and train them properly and optimally (Espinosa et al., 2006; Nurdahlia, 2023; Wood, 2016).

Objectives of the Study

This study carries two main objectives.

1. To investigate how parents perceive the usage of digital gadgets by their children
2. To understand what techniques and strategies are adopted by parents to bar their children from consuming too much time on screen

Methods and Materials

This research study is based on the interpretive approach of social research and is ostensibly qualitative and exploratory in nature. The qualitative study or design is prominently executed for a purposeful and meaningful understanding of some situation, yielding a deeper insight into the topic later (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This method also helps understand different social world aspects (Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). Moreover, the study was conducted in Quetta city (the capital) of Balochistan province, where data was collected from well-educated classes, such as university professors, educationists, government officers, lawyers, etc. The logic behind collecting data from this class was to avail informed data because this class is comparatively more conscious and curious about their children's future than the others. During data gathering, it was strictly considered that data should be collected from informants who have children born during and after 2010. The sample size for the study was 25 informants. For Creswell et al.

(2007), selecting a suitable number of informants/participants is crucial for drawing meaningful information and results in the qualitative study.

Moreover, both males and females were included in this sample. The participants were primarily interviewed in their offices. However, some were interviewed outside of their offices. Furthermore, the purposive sampling technique of non-probability sampling was adopted to collect relevant data. The data was gathered through an interview guide as a data collection tool, consisting of unstructured questions. During the study, the in-depth interview (IDI) technique of data was employed to fetch saturated data from the informants through face-to-face interaction. An in-depth interview is a prominent tool of data collection in qualitative studies, where it undergoes a one-to-one interview process between the interviewer and interviewee and involves in-depth discussion on specific topics to gather rich data (Hennink et al., 2011). After the collection of data, it was codified into different categories and divided into major themes. Later, it was further divided into minor themes to explain each theme in an exclusive way. Finally, the data was interpreted easily to make it understandable for the ordinary person.

Results and Findings

Results and findings are an important part of the research study. This section portrays the operational explanation of the study under research. Consequently, this study, which delves into parental involvement in the alpha generation's digital activities, communicates the study's essential findings. Usually and technically, the research process is started by asking informants about their personal/demographic profiles. In this context, the participants of this study were interviewed about personal data like age, their children (born in 2010 and onward), their qualifications, and employment position. During the interview process, it was found that the ages of informants ranged between 28 and 45 years. Likewise, all informants/participants had children below 12 years old. Furthermore, all informants were well-educated and worked in different government departments/offices.

The parents' perspective on the interest of the alpha generation in digital gadgets

Parents are the most critical and judgmental regarding their children's digital engagement. However, they are more conscious about the content their children watch casually and often. In this context, the parents' perspective is more reasonable in understanding Gen Alpha's inclination towards digital gadgets.

Participants expressed that digital gadgets or visuals are more attractive and entertaining. The children of the alpha generation find them very interesting owing to their multitasking nature. The kids can find everything and every piece of content easily and frequently, which may not be possible to search through other sources. These include cartoons, games, animals, films, documentaries, and football or cricket matches. Furthermore, some participants extended the idea that the diffusion of artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly fostered the orientation of Gen Alpha.

The use of interactive technology has become an addiction for the alpha generation. They feel uncomfortable and annoyed that they are deprived of these gadgets.

Nevertheless, the participants argued that the technological tools are now like digital opium for children. They do not go to bed until and unless they spend more or less time with the digital screens. Moreover, a segment of the participants viewed that in the busiest routine, the parents themselves usually engage in their activities, and to avoid engaging with children or make them calm, they (the parents) provide them mobiles and consequently, kids tilt towards digital devices frequently. The participants contended that, unlike earlier, different companies are working on launching attractive

games, cartoons, and videos for kids and earning billions of dollars, and it has now become an industry.

The positive impacts of digital technology on alpha generation children

Every field of life has shifted and switched to digitalization in the technological era. Traditional and manual techniques are being obsoletized quite rapidly. The mechanized tools have indeed made life precise and accurate. Digital technology diffusion has reinforced the alpha generation's capabilities and competence.

The participants affirmed that electronic devices are suitable for children when they are thoroughly supervised. Videos and documentaries play significant roles in their personality development, socialization, and updatibility. The purposeful videos positively changed their lives. However, two participants negated the importance of digital gadgets for Generation Alpha. They argued that not much work has been done on their applications to filter unethical materials.

Nonetheless, the other participants defended their views about the goodness of digital devices and justified that traditional tools are obsoleting and shifting to modern devices. Consequently, these gadgets could be adopted sooner or later. However, the participants extended the invitation for parents to explain the pros and cons of digital devices to their children. Moreover, a participant who returned from China recently articulated that the Chinese use mobiles for 50 minutes out of one hour. Resultantly, they are more connected with the world and more advanced. Thus, it advocates that using digital gadgets is more important for development. The participants were divided into the time spans that kids could spend on screen, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours daily.

The physical and mental impacts of wireless technology on alpha generation

Digital devices are not always suitable for the children of the alpha generation. Many times, they have negative impacts on the physical and mental health of the children. Many studies in this way found that the unchecked and excessive use of wireless devices brings several illnesses and also promotes anti-social behaviour among children.

In this respect, the study participants believed that digital gadgets have undoubtedly kept away the alpha generation's children from sports, physical activities, exercise, and outdoor games. They further argued that a lack of physical activities automatically affects metabolic processes in the body and mental health. They shared that kids of the alpha generation have remained people with insomnia and remain dormant in schools because of late-night engagements with screens. Nevertheless, few informants argued that digital gadgets have socially isolated Gen Alpha members. Moreover, many participants expressed that the negative things are more attractive than the positive ones. They asserted that mobile and related devices automatically show and glorify unethical and unsocial contents, which attract children quickly towards them, and resultantly, the inputs they take from these gadgets reflect in their behaviours and acts in their social lives as the Western culture manipulates the digital world. Parents who become progressive in the traditional society cannot let their children experience cultural convergence. The participants in a large number tried to justify that the Western world prominently dominates visual technology, and the native culture is quite different from Western culture, which consequently dilutes their values and cultural traits. However, all of the informants unanimously agree that there should be strict surveillance of children during their screen time

Alpha generation, technology and their educational career

The most integrated cohort with digital technology (alpha generation) depends more on wireless gadgets for their education and learning. Depriving children of Gen Alpha of digital tools deprives them of their fundamental educational rights. Study participants were found to be more in favor of providing technological devices to children.

The participants expressed that wireless devices contribute to the alpha generation's educational career. They argued in the majority that mobile technology is the need of the hour for Gen Alpha because these devices are like libraries and dictionaries. They download books and videos from these devices, which are recommended for their studies. The devices are improving their listening, reading and speaking power. However, they can be harmful if used for long hours. Children often watch other content more than what is relevant to their studies, which adversely impacts their educational careers. Furthermore, the participants argued that mobile technology has distanced children from the real world. They live in an imaginary world that weakens their analytical and critical thinking.

The parents' controlling strategies for Gen alpha

Excessive use of mobile and related technology harms children in every way. Members of the alpha generation are unaware of the side effects of using mobile and digital gadgets. Parents are conscious of keeping children away from these tools as long as possible.

Regarding controlling strategies adopted to keep children away from screens for a long time, the participants viewed that if children are free, they usually demand mobile phones and remain engaged. They further extended that while keeping Gen Alpha away from mobiles and other gadgets, they engage with their children in sports and play with them together. Moreover, they engage children in school work, tuition, and other academic activities. Besides this, they expressed that they remain in interactions and chat most of the time while eating, on outings, playing, and so on. In addition, a segment of the participants communicated that they arranged different exciting and relevant stories for their children to engage.

Permanent Strategies and Suggestion

In addition to the applied strategies, the participants can also suggest some long-lasting strategies that others may be able to implement to avoid alpha generation from excessive use of interactive technology.

The participants exclusively commented that the children of the alpha generation should be engaged in sports, physical activities, and outdoor games. Nevertheless, they will be given awareness about the importance of the above activities. In addition to this, they will be intimidated by the physiological, biological, mental, educational and emotional drawbacks of unnecessary use of technological gadgets. Furthermore, the participants believed that the parents should attach their children to themselves, play with them, arrange outings with family, eat together, arrange stories and other exciting books and divert them to the real world rather than the imaginary world.

Discussion

Digital gadgets have diffused to every corner of the world. These devices' entertaining and informative modes have made everyone purchase and own them. During this study, it was found that the kids of the alpha generation are more interested in digital gadgets because these devices carry content that is entertaining to the children. These contents can never be searched and viewed so efficiently and frequently as they are gained through these devices. The study found that these technological gadgets are more critical for children regarding their educational achievements and updatability if their parents properly supervise them; however, they are also harmful when they go unchecked. Consequently, the children of the alpha generation will divert

towards unethical, immoral and unsocial deeds. As harmful content is more attractive than positive content, children are more eager to watch unethical and unsocial videos in this context. The study further communicates that if these digital gadgets are used purposefully, they can provide a library, dictionary, valuable information, and so on. The study outlined that children of Gen Alpha should use digital devices for a limited time because excessive screen time may cause physical, physiological, psychological, emotional, visual, and sleeping problems. The study illuminated further that by refraining kids from these wireless gadgets for a long time, the parents reasoned that the children should be engaged in sports, physical activities and exercises, and outdoor games. They should be aware of the harmful consequences of excessive use of technological gadgets. The parents should attach and engage their children with them. Arrange exciting and informative storybooks for kids. Engage in tuition, school work and other academic activities.

Conclusion

Digital gadgets are an integral part of every family. Life without these devices is more or less impossible. Every one of us uses these devices frequently for our respective purposes, and accordingly, they have made new members (Alpha generation) demand these gadgets. People use mobile phones for information, entertainment, and to stay updated. In Pakistan, around 160 million smartphones are used this time. It has become an addict now. People can live without books, newspapers, and sports, but it is not possible to live without mobiles. Mobile gadgets have made people more introverted and have made them socially isolated. Owing to this nature, these digital devices have also affected the relations between parents and children. A famous saying is, "What elders do the children follow?". In this context, children must demand mobile phones and other gadgets while observing elders' engagement with mobiles. Consequently, parents should avoid mobile use at the maximum level except for mandatory work in front of children. Besides, kids should not be given unlimited freedom regarding mobile and other gadget usage. They should be supervised and guided. The unchecked use may lead children to anti-social ends and develop rude behavior among them. Parents should engage their children with themselves and socialize with them positively.

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