What Drives Parents to Be More Involved in Their Child's Online Activities?

Rony Tutian, Western Galilee College, Israel
Maya Kalman-Halevi, Western Galilee College, Israel
Yehuda Peled, Western Galilee College, Israel
Shani Rosengarten, Western Galilee College, Israel

The European Conference on Education 2022
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract
In recent years, information has been accumulating from various sources around the world and in Israel indicating a continuous increase in children's accessibility to smartphones. The use of these devices, which enable access to the Internet, leads to a continuous increase in children's exposure to various dangers arising from surfing the Internet and introduces challenges regarding the role of parents and their technological knowledge. Hence, research questions arise as to whether a parent's general involvement in the child's life predicts his or her involvement in his or her child's online experiences and whether there are other variables that explain parental involvement. The participants in this study were 153 Israeli parents to children aged eight to 18 years old. An online questionnaire was developed based on the EU Kids Online 2020 Survey. Results show that not all parents involved in their child's life are necessarily involved in their child's online experiences. Technological knowledge has an essential contribution to parents' involvement in their child's online experiences. Also, parental involvement in the child's online experiences was found to be higher among parents of younger children.

Keywords: Technological Knowledge, Parents' General Involvement, Parent's Involvement in the Child's Online Experiences

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Parental involvement

Parental involvement is defined as the level of the parent's active participation in the education of his or her children (Liu et al., 2020). Parental involvement has great importance and influence in a variety of aspects of the child's life, and that involvement should be seen as an ongoing process from childhood to adulthood (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). The intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics in the physical space are not the same as those that exist in the digital realm. Thus, optimal parental involvement in this reality requires the development of unique awareness and tools adapted to the developmental stages of children (Chandrima et al., 2020). In the current era, in which many rapid changes in technology are taking place, the gaps between adults and young people are growing and creating changes in parenting and in parent–child relationships (Glatz et al., 2018; Papadakis et al., 2019; Peled et al., 2019). When parents are less involved and do not monitor their children's use of the Internet, their child is more likely to be exposed to cyberbullying (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2020).

These gaps raise the following questions: whether parents' general involvement in their child's life predicts their involvement in the child's online experiences and whether all parents that are involved in their child's life are necessarily involved in their child's online experiences. Are there differences between mothers and fathers in parental involvement in general and in the child's online experiences? And does parents' technological knowledge also contribute to parental involvement in the child's online experiences? We hypothesised that parents' use of technology and parents' general involvement in their children's lives will be related to the parents' involvement in the children's online experiences.

Parents' involvement in the child's online experiences

Over the past three decades, the use of the Internet and digital technologies has become a central part of the lives of children and adolescents (Martin-Criado et al., 2021). The rise in the development of technology significantly affects most areas of life, including the way humans communicate, consume information, and manage daily activities (Shin & Kang, 2016). Parents' involvement, preferences, and beliefs towards the social network have a direct impact on the quality and quantity of digital media their children consume (Papadakis et al., 2019), so optimal involvement in this reality requires the development of unique awareness and tools adapted to children's developmental stages (Chandrima et al., 2020). Children (especially at a young age) are considered to be lacking the cognitive and mental ability to understand the complexities of using the Internet and to deal with the dangers that exist on it. Therefore, many parents feel the need to expand their technological knowledge and skills to support their children's education in this new reality, in which the social network occupies a central place in the lives of the younger generation (Musgrove et al., 2021). It was also found that, compared to boys, girls receive more guidance and mediation on the social network from their parents (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Accordingly, it is hypothesised that, with respect to the child's age, there will be a difference

in parental involvement in a child's online experiences. Moreover, it is hypothesised that parental involvement in a child's online experiences will be greater among girls.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 153 Israeli parents to children aged eight to 18 years old. The parents consisted of 110 mothers (71.9%) and 43 fathers (28.1%), with a mean age of 49.79 years (SD = 5.39, range 40–66 years). The children included 80 girls (52.3%) and 73 boys (47.7%), with a mean age of 12.95 years (SD = 2.38). Most parents were married (n = 120, 78.4%), and others were separated or divorced (n = 27, 17.6%), single (n = 3, 2.0%), or widowed (n = 3, 2.0%). Most parents had an academic degree (n = 109, 71.2%), and others had completed high school (n = 44, 28.8%). Most were Jewish (n = 136, 88.9%).

Instruments

Based on the EU Kids Online 2020 Survey (Smahel et al., 2020), an online questionnaire was developed for this research.

Parents' use of technology

Six items asked the parents about the frequency of their use of online technologies, such as social media, email, WhatsApp groups, and information search engines. Responses range from 1 (does not use at all) to 5 (high-frequency use), and an acceptable internal consistency was found: α = 0.76. The total score was composed of the mean of the items such that a higher score reflects a higher frequency of online technology use.

Parents' general involvement in the child's life

Eight items asked the parents about their involvement in their child's life. These include 'I participate in various events of my child', 'I talk with my child about television programmes', and 'My child's rules of conduct are set by negotiation and mutual consent'. Responses range from 1 (does not agree at all) to 5 (highly agree), and an acceptable internal consistency was found: α = 0.73. The total score was composed of the mean of the items such that a higher score reflects greater parental involvement.

Parents' involvement in the child's online experiences

Ten items asked the parents about their involvement in their child's online experiences. These include 'I talk with my child about his or her involvement in online games', 'I am aware of my child's exposure to cyberbullying', and 'I am aware of my child's web-browsing habits'. Responses range from 1 (does not agree at all) to 5 (highly agree), and a high internal consistency was found: α = 0.91. The total score was composed of the mean of the items such that a higher score reflects greater parental involvement.

Procedure

Online questionnaires were sent to parents via social networks. Participating parents were sampled for convenience (non-probabilistic sampling). All parents participated in the study of their own free will and were guaranteed complete anonymity in completing the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed with SPSS 28. Background variables were described with frequencies and percentages and means and standard deviations. Cronbach's α was calculated for internal consistencies. The study variables were described with means and standard deviations, and Pearson correlations were calculated between them. The relationships between the study variables and the background variables were analysed with Pearson correlations. Multiple linear regressions were calculated for parental involvement in the child's online experiences.

Results

Parents have perceived themselves as being rather frequent users of online technology and reported moderately high involvement in their children's general and online lives. Parents' use of technology and their general involvement in their children's lives were positively related with their involvement in children's online experiences (Table 1). Involvement in the children's online experiences was negatively related with the children's exposure to potentially harmful content.

Table 1. *Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations for the study variables (N = 153)*

	M (SD)	1.	2.	3.
1. Child's exposure to harmful content	1.53 (0.57)			
2. Parents' use of technology	4.37 (0.60)	−0.12		
3. Parents' general involvement	3.70 (0.57)	−0.02	0.12	
4. Parents' involvement in the child's online experiences	3.77 (0.86)	−0.30***	0.24**	0.40***

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Note: Range 1-5.

Several relationships were found to be significant between the participants' background characteristics and the study variables. Parent gender was related with general involvement in the child's life such that mothers' general involvement (M = 3.79, SD = 0.47) was higher than that of fathers (M = 3.49, SD = 0.73) (t(56.58) = 2.44, p = 0.018). Child gender was related with parental involvement in the child's online experiences such that involvement was higher for girls (M = 3.96, SD = 0.81) than for boys (M = 3.56, SD = 0.87) (t(151) = 3.00, p = 0.003). Further, the child's age was negatively related with parental involvement in the

child's online experiences (r = -0.23 p = 0.004). A parent's age was unrelated with the study variables (p = 0.239 to p = 0.868). Finally, the use of technology was more frequent for parents with an academic education (M = 4.49, SD = 0.58) than for parents with a high school education (M = 4.07, SD = 0.54) (t(151) = 4.10, p < 0.001). General involvement in the child's life was higher among parents with a high school education (M = 3.89, SD = 0.49) than among parents with an academic education (M = 3.63, SD = 0.58) (t(151 = 2.60, p = 0.010). In light of these relationships, parent gender (1: fathers, 0: mothers), child gender (1: boys, 0: girls), child's age, and parent level of education (1: academic, 0: high school) were controlled for when the study hypothesis was examined.

A multiple regression model was calculated for parental involvement in the child's online experiences (Table 2).

Table 2. *Multiple linear regressions for parental involvement in the child's online experiences (N = 153)*

| | Parental involvement in the child's online experiences | | |
	B	**SE**	**β**
Child's age	−0.08	0.03	−0.21**
Child's gender (boy)	−0.25	0.12	−0.15*
Parent's gender (father)	0.08	0.14	0.04
Parent education (academic)	−0.26	0.15	−0.13
Parent's use of technology	0.32	0.11	0.22**
Parent's general involvement in the child's life	0.53	0.11	0.35***
Adj. R^2	0.265***		
F	F(6, 146) = 10.06***		

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Results show that this model is significant, with about 26% of the variance being explained in parental involvement in the child's online experiences. Parental involvement in the child's online experiences was higher for girls and younger children, as well as with higher parental use of technology and higher parental general involvement in the child's life.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine which variables predict parental involvement in a child's online experiences. When the parent is more aware, more involved, and more knowledgeable about what content his or her child is using, he or she can better direct the child to reduce and even prevent cyberbullying against the child (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

According to the first hypothesis, there will be a positive relationship between parental involvement in the child's life and parental involvement in the child's online experiences. Research findings indicate that this hypothesis has been confirmed. As Internet use becomes widespread at home, parents are trying to maximise their children's online opportunities while also minimising online risks (Livingstone et al., 2017), and parents' online involvement

contributes to success among children in the virtual environment (Qasim et al., 2021) while keeping children less exposed to cyberbullying (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2020). At the same time, it seems that not every parent who reports involvement in a child's life is indeed also involved in his or her child's online experiences.

Subsequently, another research hypothesis emerged that there is a positive relationship between a parent's use of technology and his or her involvement in his or her child's online experiences. The findings of the study indicate that this hypothesis was also confirmed. A significant positive relationship was found between a parent's use of technology and his or her involvement in the child's online experiences. This relationship is also found beyond the parent's general involvement in the child's life and is supported by the notion that, for a parent to be more involved in his or her children's online experiences, he or she must have digital skills (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Parents with higher levels of digital skills who believed in their ability to influence their children and encourage their children to use the social network safely (Glatz et al., 2018) understand and criticise what their children are doing online (Smahel et al., 2020). It was also found that a parent's use of technology was more frequent for parents with an academic education than for parents with a high school education but was unrelated with his or her age. It seems that parents with a higher level of education adapt more easily to new conditions and strive to develop a better learning environment at home.

Moreover, the present study found that parental involvement in the child's online experiences was higher among parents of girls and parents of younger children. Parents may feel a greater need to care for and protect girls and young children, or girls and young children may allow more parental involvement compared with boys or older children.

Conclusions

Parental involvement in their children's lives in general and in their children's online experiences in particular is very important in the technological age, in which mobile devices that facilitate surfing the Internet are an integral part of the children's routine.

The novelty in this study is that not every parent who reports involvement in their child's life is also involved in their child's online experiences. Current findings imply that beyond basic involvement in a child's life, a parent's use of technology will predict involvement in his or her child's online experiences. Therefore, in therapeutic work and parental guidance, it is important to raise parents' awareness of the importance of parental involvement in general and parental involvement in online experiences in particular and to provide tools to implement that involvement. In addition, it is recommended that lectures be conducted for parents on digital knowledge and skills so that they can feel confident and believe in their ability to be involved in this significant area of network life. The study is particularly relevant in the current era, in which the gaps between the child and the parent are growing, and a change of roles can be seen, in which parents more often need help and mediation from their child to integrate and orient themselves on social networks.

References

Chandrima, R. M., Kircaburun, K., Kabir, H., Riaz, B.K., Kuss, D. J., Griffiths, M. D., & Mamun, M. A. (2020). Adolescent problematic internet use and parentalmediation: A Bangladeshi structured interview study. Addictive Behaviours Reports, 12, 100–288.

Durisic, M., & Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental involvement is an important factor forsuccessful education. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal 7(3), 137-153.

Folkvord, F. (2017). Maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for children online: The role of digital skills in emerging strategies of parental mediation. Journal of Communication, 67(1), 82-105.

Glatz, T., Crowe, E., & Buchanan, C.M. (2018). Internet-specific parental self-efficacy:Developmental differences and links to internet-specific mediation. Computers in Human Behavior, 84, 8-17.

Liu, Y., Sulaimani, M.F., & Henning, J. E. (2020). The significance of parentalinvolvement in the development in infancy. Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 10(1), 11.Livingston, S., Olafsson, K., Helsper, E. J., Lupianez-Villanueva, F., Veltri, G. A., &

Lozano-Blasco, R., Cortes-Pascual, A., & Latorre-Martinez. P. (2020). Being a cyber victim and a cyberbully – The duality of cyberbullying: A meta-analysis. Computers in Human Behavior, 106-444.

Martin-Criado, J.M., Casas, J.A., & Ortega-Ruiz, R. (2021). Parental supervision:predictive variables of positive involvement in cyberbullying prevention. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(4), 1562 1574.

Mladenovic, V., Djukanovic, S., Stefanovic, N., Kar, A., Jovanovic, M., & Makov, S. (2021). Kids security on social networks by face blur technique. In IPO Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering (Vol. 1029, No. 1, p. 012042). IOP Publishing.

Musgrove, A., Powers, J., Willems, P., & Gonzalez-DeHass, A. (2021). SupportingAll Parents' Involvement in K-12 Online Learning. In Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference (384–387). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).

Papadakis, S., Zarais, N., & Kalogiannakis, M. (2019). Parental involvement and attitudes towards young Greek children's mobile usage. International Journal of Child-Computer Interaction, 22, 100-144.

Peled, Y., Eshet, Y., Barczyk, C., & Grinautski, K. (2019). Predictors of Academic Dishonesty among undergraduate students in online and face-to-face courses, Computers & Education, 131, 49-59.

Qasim, M., Saleem, A., & Hafeez, M. (2021). Parental involvement in online learning and academic achievements of their children under COVID-19 conditions. Pakistan Social Sciences Review, 5(4), 1–14.

Shin, W., & Kang, H. (2016). Adolescents' privacy concerns and information disclosureonline: the role of parents and the internet. Computers in Human Behavior, 54, 114-123.

Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Olafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020) EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries. EU Kids Online.

Vandebosch, H., & Van Cleemput, K. (2009). Cyberbullying among youngsters: Profiles of bullies and victims. New Media & Society, 11 (8), 1349-1371.

Wahlund, T., Walhem, M., Serlachius, E., & Engberg, H. (2021). Experiences of online exposure-based treatment with parental support for teenagers with excessive worry. The Cognitive Behaviour Therapist, 14, 1-13.

Contact email: ronyt@wgalil.ac.il