







ORIGINAL

## Empowering Gen Z Parents through Digital Literacy Pedagogy: A Model for Navigating Parenting Advice on Social

## Empoderar a los padres de la Generación Z a través de la pedagogía de la alfabetización digital: un modelo para abordar los consejos de crianza en las redes sociales

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** social media platforms have become primary sources of parenting advice for Generation Z parents, yet their digital literacy skills in evaluating such content remain poorly understood. This study aimed to explore how Gen Z parents engage with parenting advice on social media, examine how digital literacy pedagogy influences their content evaluation abilities, and identify components for an effective digital literacy model.

**Method:** a qualitative case study design was employed with 18 Gen Z parents aged 20-30 from West Sumatra, Indonesia, using semi-structured interviews, content mapping, and digital behavior observation. Thematic analysis revealed three key findings: participants demonstrated sophisticated platform-specific engagement strategies but relied on “relatability” rather than traditional credibility markers; digital literacy levels varied significantly, with context-specific blind spots even among technically proficient users; and participants desired community-based verification systems combining peer wisdom with expert oversight.

**Results:** the study challenges assumptions about digital nativity automatically translating to parenting-specific digital literacy, revealing that even digital natives require targeted support for evaluating social media parenting content. The findings suggest that effective digital literacy interventions must be domain-specific, ongoing, and incorporate collective intelligence approaches rather than focusing solely on individual critical evaluation skills.

**Conclusions:** this research contributes a novel theoretical framework emphasizing authenticity-based trust evaluation and community verification systems, providing practical implications for educators, policymakers, and digital platform designers seeking to support informed parenting decisions in social media environment.

**Keywords:** Digital Literacy; Social Media Parenting; Generation Z; Parenting Advice; Media Literacy Education.

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** las plataformas de redes sociales se han convertido en fuentes principales de consejos parentales para los padres de la Generación Z; sin embargo, sus habilidades de alfabetización digital para evaluar dicho contenido siguen siendo poco conocidas. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar cómo los padres de la Generación Z interactúan con los consejos parentales en redes sociales, examinar cómo la pedagogía de la alfabetización digital influye en sus habilidades de evaluación de contenido e identificar los

componentes de un modelo eficaz de alfabetización digital.

**Método:** se empleó un diseño de estudio de caso cualitativo con 18 padres de la Generación Z de entre 20 y 30 años de Sumatra Occidental, Indonesia, mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, mapeo de contenido y observación del comportamiento digital. El análisis temático reveló tres hallazgos clave: los participantes demostraron estrategias sofisticadas de interacción específicas de la plataforma, pero se basaron en la “identidad” en lugar de los indicadores de credibilidad tradicionales; los niveles de alfabetización digital variaron significativamente, con puntos ciegos específicos del contexto incluso entre usuarios con dominio técnico; y los participantes deseaban sistemas de verificación comunitarios que combinaran la experiencia de pares con la supervisión de expertos.

**Resultados:** el estudio cuestiona las suposiciones sobre la naturalidad digital que se traduce automáticamente en alfabetización digital específica para la crianza, revelando que incluso los nativos digitales requieren apoyo específico para evaluar el contenido parental en redes sociales. Los hallazgos sugieren que las intervenciones eficaces de alfabetización digital deben ser específicas de cada dominio, continuas e incorporar enfoques de inteligencia colectiva, en lugar de centrarse únicamente en las habilidades individuales de evaluación crítica.

**Conclusiones:** esta investigación aporta un marco teórico novedoso que enfatiza la evaluación de la confianza basada en la autenticidad y los sistemas de verificación comunitaria, ofreciendo implicaciones prácticas para educadores, legisladores y diseñadores de plataformas digitales que buscan apoyar la toma de decisiones informadas sobre la crianza en el entorno de las redes sociales.

**Palabras clave:** Alfabetización Digital; Crianza En Redes Sociales; Generación Z; Consejos Para Padres; Educación En Alfabetización Mediática.

## INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, parenting has become increasingly intertwined with online media consumption. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are not only entertainment hubs but also serve as informal learning spaces for parenting advice, community-building, and identity formation among young parents.<sup>(1,2)</sup> This trend is particularly pronounced among Generation Z parents—those born between 1997 and 2012—who have grown up as digital natives and thus instinctively turn to social platforms to seek guidance on child-rearing practices.<sup>(3,4)</sup> Despite the ease of access and the diversity of information available online, the quality, credibility, and psychological impact of such digital parenting content remain poorly understood.

The increasing dependency of young parents on social media for parenting advice presents both opportunities and significant challenges. On the one hand, social platforms democratize access to parenting knowledge and enable peer-to-peer support, thus potentially empowering parents in real-time decision-making.<sup>(5)</sup> On the other hand, unregulated digital content can promote misinformation, idealized parenting norms, and unrealistic expectations, leading to anxiety, confusion, or guilt among users.<sup>(6,7)</sup> Scholars have noted how mothers and fathers—especially those new to parenting—may fall into cycles of comparison, pressure, or performativity due to curated lifestyles presented on these platforms.<sup>(4)</sup> This psychological burden is compounded by low levels of digital literacy, particularly in contexts where critical media evaluation skills are not commonly taught.<sup>(8,9)</sup>

Digital literacy, broadly understood as the ability to access, evaluate, create, and communicate using digital tools,<sup>(10)</sup> plays a critical role in mitigating the risks associated with social media parenting. It enables users to critically assess the credibility of influencers, distinguish between evidence-based content and anecdotal opinions, and protect their emotional well-being from harmful content.<sup>(11,12)</sup> Yet, empirical studies on digital parenting literacy remain scarce, fragmented, and overly generalized. Many existing studies treat parents as a monolithic group, overlooking the distinct needs, values, and media habits of Gen Z parents.<sup>(13,14)</sup> Furthermore, most frameworks fail to offer practical models or interventions that could help this demographic navigate social media parenting content responsibly.

While previous research has documented the role of digital literacy in education, public health, and youth media practices,<sup>(15,16)</sup> few studies have developed or tested models of digital parenting literacy specific to emerging generations. The lack of theoretically grounded and practically oriented models leaves a critical gap in addressing the real-world challenges of digital parenting in the social media age. As Gen Z transitions into parenthood, their dependence on online platforms for parenting advice is likely to intensify, making it imperative to create models that support safe, informed, and reflective engagement with digital content.<sup>(17,18)</sup>

This study aims to address these gaps by developing a conceptual model for empowering Gen Z parents through digital literacy. Anchored in media literacy education and digital well-being theory, the study explores how Gen Z parents engage with parenting content on social media, how digital literacy influences their content interpretation and parenting choices, and how an educational intervention can enhance their decision-making.

By centering the voices and lived experiences of Gen Z parents, this research aspires to move beyond critique and toward actionable, inclusive, and generationally responsive solutions.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. Gen Z parents' strategies for engaging with parenting advice on social media platforms, and the types of content they trust to engage with.
2. Digital literacy shapes Gen Z parents' ability to critically listen to and apply parenting content found on social media.
3. Key components of an effective digital literacy-based model that can empower Gen Z parents to make informed parenting decisions in a challenging environment.

Through a combination of qualitative inquiry and intervention development, this study seeks to contribute both theoretical and practical advancements in the fields of parenting, media literacy, and digital education. The findings are expected to inform educators, policymakers, and designers of digital parenting resources, offering a roadmap for cultivating resilience, discernment, and empowerment in digital parenting practices.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how Generation Z (Gen Z) parents engage with parenting advice on social media, how their levels of digital literacy shape their content interpretation, and how a conceptual model can empower them to make informed parenting decisions. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate due to the study's aim of deeply understanding complex and contextualized behaviors, perceptions, and digital experiences.<sup>(19)</sup> The case study method was specifically selected to provide an in-depth investigation into a bounded group—Gen Z parents residing in Indonesia—who actively use social media for parenting guidance. By focusing on this group, the research could capture rich, nuanced insights into both individual and collective behaviors.<sup>(20)</sup>

### Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the urban and suburban regions of West Sumatra, Indonesia, where internet penetration and social media engagement among Gen Z users are relatively high.<sup>(8)</sup> Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting Gen Z parents aged 20 to 30 years who are active users of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for parenting information. Additional inclusion criteria required participants to have at least one child under the age of five and to self-identify as regular seekers or consumers of digital parenting content.

Recruitment was carried out via local parenting communities, social media parenting groups, and early childhood education networks. To ensure variation in digital literacy levels and socio-economic backgrounds, efforts were made to include participants from diverse educational and occupational sectors. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent was collected from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

A total of 18 participants were recruited for this study. The following table provides demographic information of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Education Level	Occupation	Primary Platform Used	Number of Children	Daily Screen Time (hrs)
P1	24	Female	Bachelor's	Freelancer	Instagram	1	4,5
P2	28	Male	Bachelor's	Online Marketer	YouTube	2	6
P3	27	Female	Diploma	Midwife	TikTok	1	5
P4	23	Female	High School	Homemaker	TikTok	1	3
P5	30	Male	Master's	Teacher	Instagram	2	4
P6	25	Female	Bachelor's	Content Creator	Instagram	1	7
P7	26	Male	Bachelor's	Private Employee	YouTube	1	3,5
P8	29	Female	Master's	Civil Servant	Instagram	2	4
P9	22	Female	High School	Homemaker	TikTok	1	2,5
P10	30	Female	Diploma	Nurse	YouTube	2	4,5
P11	28	Male	Bachelor's	Retail Business	TikTok	2	6
P12	25	Female	Bachelor's	NGO Worker	Instagram	1	5
P13	27	Female	Master's	Lecturer	Instagram	1	3,5
P14	26	Male	Bachelor's	Technician	YouTube	2	4,5
P15	24	Female	Bachelor's	Kindergarten Teacher	TikTok	1	4

P16	23	Female	Diploma	Admin Staff	Instagram	1	3
P17	29	Male	Bachelor's	IT Support	YouTube	2	5,5
P18	30	Female	Master's	Education Officer	Instagram	2	4

## Data Collection

### *Mapping, and digital behavior observation*

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing tools, depending on participant preference and availability. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant permission. The interview protocol included open-ended questions that explored participants' experiences using social media for parenting advice, the types of content they consumed, their strategies for assessing trustworthiness, and the emotional or behavioral impact of the content.

Participants were also asked to screen-record or document specific examples of social media content they engaged with over a week, which were later discussed during follow-up interviews. This method, aligned with the "think-aloud" protocol,<sup>(21)</sup> enabled researchers to gain insights into participants' real-time reflections and digital literacy in action. A content mapping grid was used to classify sources of parenting content (e.g., influencer, government, peer) and to assess their alignment with evidence-based parenting principles.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun et al.<sup>(22)</sup> six-phase framework: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. NVivo 14 software was used for organizing transcripts, codes, and media files. Two researchers independently coded the data and met regularly to discuss discrepancies, which were resolved through consensus. Triangulation was ensured through the use of multiple data sources (interviews, media content, and observation), member checking, and peer debriefing with a qualitative expert.

Themes were categorized under three major dimensions: (1) patterns of social media usage for parenting, (2) levels and practices of digital literacy, and (3) opportunities for empowerment and intervention. A cross-case matrix was developed to identify similarities and differences across demographic lines such as gender, occupation, and platform preference.

## Ethical Aspects of the Research

This research adhered to established ethical standards for studies involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from gen z, while gen z participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were ensured throughout the study, with data used solely for academic purposes. Ethical clearance was formally granted by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Negeri Padang (Approval No. 035/KEPK-UNP/11/2025). The study prioritized the protection, dignity, and welfare of all participants, particularly the gen z involved.

## RESULT

The findings from this qualitative case study reveal complex patterns of social media engagement among Gen Z parents, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges they face when navigating digital parenting advice. Through thematic analysis of 18 in-depth interviews, three overarching themes emerged that directly address the research questions: patterns of social media engagement for parenting guidance, the role of digital literacy in content evaluation, and the essential components for empowering digital parenting models.

### Gen Z Parents' Engagement with Social Media Parenting Advice

#### *Platform Preferences and Content Types*

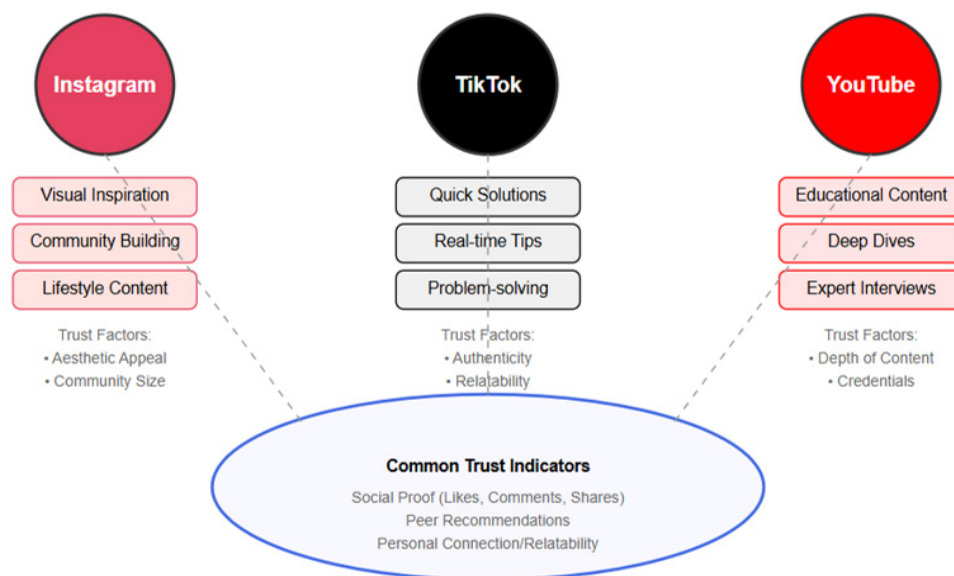
Gen Z parents in this study demonstrated distinct preferences for different social media platforms based on the type of parenting information they sought. Instagram emerged as the primary platform for visual parenting inspiration and community building, while TikTok was favored for quick, practical parenting tips and real-time problem-solving. YouTube served as the go-to platform for comprehensive, educational content requiring deeper engagement.

P6, a content creator and mother of one, explained her platform usage strategy: "I use Instagram for the aesthetic parenting stuff, you know, nursery setups, cute outfits, and connecting with other moms who have similar vibes. But when my baby was having sleep issues, I went straight to TikTok because I needed quick solutions, not pretty pictures. TikTok moms are more real about the struggles." This sentiment reflects a sophisticated understanding of platform affordances, where parents strategically navigate different digital spaces based on their immediate needs.

The types of content that resonated most with participants included authentic, experience-based advice from peer parents rather than expert recommendations. P3, a midwife and mother, shared: "I trust the mom

who's been through three sleepless nights and shares her honest experience more than the pediatrician who gives textbook advice. The real moms show you the messy reality, not the perfect version." This preference for authenticity over authority represents a significant shift in how this generation approaches parenting knowledge acquisition.

The data revealed distinct patterns in how participants navigated different platforms based on their specific parenting needs and the types of content available. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between platform preferences, content types sought, and the primary trust factors that influenced participants' engagement decisions. This visualization demonstrates how Gen Z parents strategically utilize multiple platforms as part of an integrated approach to digital parenting support, with each platform serving specific functions in their information-seeking behavior.



**Figure 1.** Platform Engagement Patterns Among Gen Z Parents

The cross-platform usage patterns revealed that participants rarely relied on a single source for parenting guidance. Instead, they created personalized information ecosystems that combined visual inspiration from Instagram, practical solutions from TikTok, and comprehensive education from YouTube. This multi-platform approach reflects a sophisticated understanding of each platform's strengths and limitations, though it also increases exposure to potentially conflicting advice and varying quality standards.

#### *Trust Building and Source Credibility*

Participants developed sophisticated, albeit sometimes flawed, mechanisms for evaluating source credibility on social media. The concept of "relatability" emerged as a primary trust indicator, often superseding traditional markers of expertise or credentials. P11, a retail business owner and father of two, described his evaluation process: "I look for parents who seem like they're in similar situations as me. If they're dealing with the same challenges, working similar hours, and their kids are acting like mine, then I figure their advice might actually work for my family."

However, this relatability-based trust system sometimes led participants to overlook important credibility markers. P15, a kindergarten teacher and mother, admitted: "I followed this mom influencer for months because her content always made me feel better about my parenting struggles. It wasn't until another mom pointed out that she was promoting some questionable sleep training methods that I realized I never actually checked if she had any real qualifications."

The social proof mechanism was particularly influential among participants, with engagement metrics serving as implicit quality indicators. P8, a civil servant and mother of two, explained: "If a parenting post has thousands of likes and hundreds of comments from other parents saying 'this worked for me too,' I'm more likely to trust it. It's like having a huge focus group of parents validating the advice."

#### *Emotional and Behavioral Impact*

The emotional impact of social media parenting content was profound and often contradictory. While participants frequently found validation and community through digital platforms, they also experienced significant anxiety and self-doubt triggered by comparison with curated parenting content. P4, a homemaker



and mother of one, captured this duality: “Social media saved my sanity during those early newborn days. I felt so isolated, and seeing other moms going through the same things made me feel normal. But then I’d see these perfect morning routines with toddlers and think ‘what’s wrong with me that I can barely get dressed by noon?’”

The performative aspects of social media parenting created additional pressure for participants to document and share their own parenting experiences. P12, an NGO worker and mother, reflected: “I started posting pictures of my daughter’s meals because I saw other moms doing it, and I wanted to show that I was feeding her well too. But then I realized I was spending more time arranging her food for photos than actually enjoying mealtime with her.”

Several participants described cycles of content consumption that alternated between inspiration and overwhelm. P17, an IT support specialist and father of two, noted: “I’d start by looking for one specific answer, like how to handle tantrums, and three hours later I’d consumed so much conflicting advice that I felt more confused than when I started. It’s like information overload, but for parenting decisions that feel really high-stakes.”

## Digital Literacy’s Influence on Content Evaluation

### *Critical Evaluation Skills*

The participants’ digital literacy levels varied significantly, directly impacting their ability to critically assess parenting content on social media. Those with higher digital literacy demonstrated more sophisticated strategies for evaluating source credibility, cross-referencing information, and identifying potential biases or commercial interests.

P13, a lecturer with a master’s degree, exemplified advanced digital literacy practices: “I never take parenting advice from just one source. If I see something interesting on Instagram, I’ll search for the same topic on Google Scholar to see if there’s actual research behind it. I also check if the person sharing the advice has any financial incentives, like if they’re selling a course or product related to what they’re recommending.”

In contrast, participants with lower digital literacy often relied on surface-level indicators and emotional responses to evaluate content. P9, a homemaker with a high school education, described her approach: “I mostly go with my gut feeling. If the person seems nice and their advice feels right, I’ll try it. I don’t really know how to check if they’re qualified or not, and honestly, I don’t have time to research everything.”

### *Information Verification Strategies*

Participants employed various strategies for verifying information, ranging from sophisticated cross-referencing to simple peer consultation. Those with higher digital literacy often utilized multiple verification methods, while others relied primarily on social validation within their networks.

P10, a nurse and mother of two, demonstrated professional-level verification skills: “My medical background makes me automatically skeptical of health-related parenting advice on social media. I’ll check medical databases, consult with colleagues, and look for peer-reviewed sources before implementing anything that could affect my children’s health. But I know most parents don’t have access to these resources or know how to use them.”

P16, an administrative staff member, revealed a more common approach: “I usually ask in my mom group chat if anyone has tried whatever advice I’m considering. If a few moms say it worked for them, that’s usually enough verification for me. I trust the collective wisdom of my mom friends more than some random expert online.”

### *Awareness of Algorithmic Influence*

Participants showed varying levels of awareness regarding how social media algorithms shape their content exposure. Those with higher digital literacy demonstrated understanding of filter bubbles and echo chambers, while others remained largely unaware of algorithmic curation.

P5, a teacher with a master’s degree, showed sophisticated algorithmic awareness: “I’m very conscious that Instagram is showing me content based on what I’ve liked before. So, if I engage with a lot of attachment parenting content, that’s all I’ll see, and I might miss other valid parenting approaches. I try to actively search for different perspectives to avoid getting stuck in one parenting philosophy bubble.”

P14, a technician and father of two, had a more technical understanding: “I work with technology, so I know these platforms are designed to keep you engaged, not necessarily to give you the best information. The algorithm will show you whatever keeps scrolling, which might be the most controversial or emotionally triggering content, not the most helpful or accurate.”

However, many participants remained unaware of algorithmic influence. P2, an online marketer, paradoxically demonstrated professional understanding of digital marketing while showing limited awareness of how algorithms affected his parenting content consumption: “I know how targeting works for my business,

but I never really thought about how it applies to the parenting content I see. I just assumed the platform was showing me relevant stuff based on my interests.”

#### *Commercial Awareness and Sponsored Content*

Recognition of commercial interests and sponsored content varied significantly among participants. While platform policies require disclosure of paid partnerships, many participants struggled to identify subtle forms of commercial influence or affiliate marketing within parenting content.

P7, a private employee and father, demonstrated growing commercial awareness: “I’ve started to notice that a lot of these parenting influencers are always recommending products. Even when they’re not explicitly saying it’s an ad, they’re usually getting something out of it. It makes me question whether their advice is genuine or if they’re just trying to sell me something.”

P18, an education officer with a master’s degree, showed sophisticated understanding of commercial influence: “I look for patterns in what influencers promote. If someone is constantly recommending expensive products or services, especially ones they’re personally involved with, I’m skeptical of their advice. I prefer content creators who are transparent about their commercial relationships and who also share advice that doesn’t cost anything to implement.”

#### **Components of an Effective Digital Literacy Model**

##### *Source Evaluation Framework*

Participants identified the need for a structured framework to evaluate parenting content sources on social media. The desired framework would go beyond traditional credentialing to include relevance, transparency, and alignment with individual family values.

P1, a freelancer and mother, articulated this need: “I wish there was a simple checklist I could use to quickly evaluate whether a parenting influencer or piece of advice is worth considering. Something that would help me look beyond whether I like the person or their aesthetic and actually assess if their advice is sound and appropriate for my family.”

The framework components that emerged from participant discussions included assessing the source’s transparency about qualifications and potential conflicts of interest, evaluating the evidence base for recommendations, considering the diversity of perspectives presented, and examining the alignment with individual family circumstances and values.

P8, a civil servant and mother of two, emphasized the importance of context: “Generic parenting advice often doesn’t work because every family is different. I need a way to evaluate whether advice is appropriate for my specific situation - my kids’ ages, my work schedule, my cultural background, my financial situation. A good framework would help me filter out advice that might work for someone else but isn’t realistic for my family.”

##### *Community Verification Systems*

Participants expressed desire for community-based verification systems that would leverage collective parenting wisdom while maintaining quality control. This system would combine peer review with expert oversight to create more reliable information networks.

P12, an NGO worker and mother, described her vision: “I’d love to have a community where experienced parents and relevant experts could review and rate parenting advice that’s popular on social media. Not to censor anything, but to provide additional context and flag content that might be harmful or unrealistic. It would be like having a trusted friend who’s also a child development expert available 24/7.”

The community verification system would ideally include transparent rating systems based on evidence quality and practical applicability, diverse perspectives that represent different family structures and cultural backgrounds, expert consultation for health and safety-related advice, and peer feedback mechanisms that capture real-world implementation experiences.

##### *Reflective Engagement Tools*

Participants identified the need for tools that promote reflective engagement with digital parenting content rather than passive consumption. These tools would help parents align social media advice with their family values and circumstances.

P13, a lecturer and mother, proposed: “Before implementing any parenting advice from social media, there should be a reflection process. Questions like: Does this align with my family’s values? Do I have the resources to implement this consistently? What are the potential risks or downsides? Am I doing this because it’s genuinely best for my child or because I want to appear to be a good parent on social media?”

The reflective engagement tools would include guided questions for evaluating advice applicability, value clarification exercises to help parents identify their core parenting principles, implementation planning resources that consider practical constraints, and progress tracking systems that focus on family well-being

rather than social media metrics.

P6, a content creator and mother, added: “As someone who creates parenting content, I also think parents need tools to reflect on their own sharing habits. Are you posting about your parenting journey for genuine connection and support, or are you performing good parenting for social validation? Both can be okay, but being conscious of your motivations helps you engage more authentically.”

### Educational Intervention Components

The participants’ experiences revealed several key components that would be essential for an effective digital literacy intervention targeting Gen Z parents. These components address both technical skills and critical thinking abilities needed to navigate digital parenting environments.

P10, a nurse and mother of two, emphasized the importance of practical application: “Any digital literacy program for parents needs to use real examples of parenting content that we actually encounter. Show us actual Instagram posts, TikTok videos, and YouTube channels that parents commonly follow, and teach us how to evaluate them step by step. Abstract lessons about media literacy won’t stick when you’re sleep-deprived and desperately looking for solutions to your toddler’s behavior.”

The educational intervention should include hands-on practice with actual social media parenting content, instruction on identifying credible sources and potential red flags, training on understanding algorithmic influence and filter bubbles, guidance on balancing multiple perspectives and sources of information, and strategies for managing the emotional impact of social media comparison.

P15, a kindergarten teacher and mother, highlighted the need for ongoing support: “Digital literacy isn’t something you learn once and then you’re done. The platforms change, new influencers appear, and your needs as a parent evolve as your children grow. An effective program would provide ongoing resources and community support, not just a one-time workshop.”

The sustainability components would include peer learning communities where parents can share experiences and strategies, regular updates on platform changes and new digital trends, access to expert consultation for complex or concerning content, and resources for different stages of child development and parenting challenges.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of participants’ experiences and identified needs, a conceptual framework for digital parenting literacy emerged from the data. Figure 2 presents this integrated model, illustrating how the four core components work together to create a comprehensive support system for Gen Z parents navigating social media parenting advice. The model emphasizes the cyclical and interconnected nature of digital literacy development, recognizing that effective digital parenting requires ongoing skill development, community support, and reflective practice.



**Figure 2.** Integrated Digital Parenting Literacy Model for Gen Z Parents



These findings reveal that while Gen Z parents are sophisticated digital natives in many ways, they require targeted support to navigate the specific challenges of social media parenting advice. The complexity of their engagement patterns, the varying levels of digital literacy skills, and their articulated needs for structured support systems all point toward the necessity of comprehensive, ongoing digital literacy interventions specifically designed for the parenting context.

## DISCUSSION

### Alignment with Existing Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

The findings of this study both corroborate and extend existing research on digital literacy and social media parenting, while revealing unique patterns specific to Generation Z parents. The sophisticated platform navigation strategies observed among participants align with<sup>(25)</sup> characterization of Gen Z as digital natives who instinctively turn to social platforms for guidance. However, this study reveals a more nuanced picture than previously understood, showing that digital nativity does not automatically translate to digital literacy in parenting contexts, a finding that challenges assumptions in earlier research by<sup>(26)</sup>.

The preference for authenticity over traditional authority that emerged from participant interviews strongly supports the democratization of parenting knowledge described by<sup>(27)</sup>. Participants consistently valued experiential advice from peer parents over expert recommendations, reflecting what<sup>(28)</sup> identified as the community-building potential of social media platforms. This finding extends beyond previous research by demonstrating how Gen Z parents have developed sophisticated, albeit sometimes flawed, trust evaluation mechanisms that prioritize relatability and social proof over traditional credentialing. The emergence of “relatability” as a primary trust indicator represents a significant departure from conventional information evaluation frameworks and suggests that traditional media literacy education may be insufficient for addressing the unique challenges of social media parenting advice.

The psychological burden identified in this study, particularly the cycles of comparison and performativity described by participants, directly supports the concerns raised by some researchers<sup>(29,30)</sup> regarding the negative impacts of curated social media content. The finding that participants experienced alternating cycles of inspiration and overwhelm aligns with existing research on social media’s contradictory effects, but this study provides deeper insight into how these cycles specifically manifest in parenting contexts. The detailed accounts of participants like P4 and P12 reveal how the performative aspects of social media parenting create additional layers of stress and self-doubt that extend beyond general social media comparison effects documented in earlier studies.

### Digital Literacy Variations and Implications

The significant variations in digital literacy levels observed among participants support the fragmented nature of digital literacy skills.<sup>(31,32)</sup> However, this study reveals that even participants with high general digital literacy, such as P2 who worked in online marketing, demonstrated blind spots when it came to recognizing algorithmic influence on their parenting content consumption. This finding suggests that digital literacy is highly context-dependent and that professional digital skills do not necessarily transfer to personal information evaluation contexts, a nuance not adequately addressed in previous research.

The sophisticated verification strategies employed by participants with higher digital literacy, exemplified by P13’s cross-referencing with academic sources, align with the critical media evaluation skills.<sup>(33,34)</sup> However, the study reveals a concerning gap between those with advanced verification skills and those relying primarily on social validation, supporting the digital divide concerns.<sup>(35)</sup> The finding that participants like P9 relied primarily on “gut feeling” and social validation highlights the inadequacy of current digital literacy frameworks to reach all demographic segments effectively.

The varying levels of algorithmic awareness among participants provide empirical support for the filter bubble concerns raised in digital literacy literature, while revealing how these effects specifically manifest in parenting contexts. The sophisticated understanding demonstrated by P5 and P14 contrasts sharply with the algorithmic blindness shown by others, suggesting that awareness of algorithmic curation is not uniformly distributed even among digital natives. This finding extends existing research by showing how algorithmic influence can create parenting philosophy echo chambers that may limit exposure to diverse approaches to child-rearing.

### Theoretical Framework Connections and Extensions

The study’s findings strongly support the media literacy education framework proposed by Smith<sup>(36)</sup>, particularly the emphasis on critical evaluation and communication skills. However, the results suggest that traditional media literacy education requires significant adaptation for social media parenting contexts. The participants’ need for source evaluation frameworks that go beyond credentialing to include relevance,

transparency, and value alignment represents an evolution of media literacy theory that has not been adequately addressed in existing literature.

The digital well-being theory<sup>(30)</sup> finds strong empirical support in the participants' experiences of social media's contradictory effects on their parenting confidence and mental health. The study extends this theoretical framework by identifying specific mechanisms through which social media parenting content impacts well-being, including the performativity pressure and comparison cycles that participants described. The finding that participants needed reflective engagement tools to align social media advice with their family values suggests that digital well-being in parenting contexts requires more sophisticated intervention approaches than general digital wellness frameworks typically provide.<sup>(37)</sup>

The community-based verification systems desired by participants represent a novel extension of existing digital literacy theory. While previous research has focused primarily on individual critical evaluation skills, this study reveals that Gen Z parents seek collective intelligence approaches that combine peer wisdom with expert oversight. This finding suggests that future digital literacy interventions should incorporate social learning elements that leverage the community-building aspects of social media while maintaining quality control mechanisms.

### Unique Contributions and Departures from Existing Research

This study makes several unique contributions that distinguish it from existing research on digital literacy and social media parenting. First, the identification of platform-specific engagement strategies among Gen Z parents reveals a level of sophistication in digital navigation that has not been adequately captured in previous studies. The finding that participants strategically use Instagram for inspiration, TikTok for quick solutions, and YouTube for comprehensive education suggests that digital literacy frameworks must account for platform affordances and user intentions rather than treating social media as a monolithic entity.<sup>(38)</sup>

Second, the study's revelation that digital nativity does not automatically translate to digital literacy in parenting contexts challenges fundamental assumptions in existing research. While previous studies have often assumed that younger generations possess inherent digital literacy skills, this research demonstrates that context-specific literacy skills require targeted development. The finding that even technically proficient participants like P2 showed blind spots in recognizing algorithmic influence on their parenting content consumption suggests that digital literacy education must be domain-specific rather than generic.<sup>(39)</sup>

Third, the emergence of "relatability" as a primary trust indicator represents a significant departure from traditional information evaluation frameworks. Previous research has focused primarily on credentialing and expertise as trust markers, but this study reveals that Gen Z parents have developed alternative evaluation criteria that prioritize shared experience and authenticity. This finding has important implications for both digital literacy education and the design of credible parenting information resources.

Fourth, the study's identification of community verification systems as a desired intervention component represents a novel approach to digital literacy that has not been adequately explored in existing literature. While previous research has focused on individual critical evaluation skills, this study reveals that Gen Z parents seek collective intelligence approaches that combine peer wisdom with expert oversight. This finding suggests that future digital literacy interventions should incorporate social learning elements that leverage the community-building aspects of social media while maintaining quality control mechanisms.<sup>(40)</sup>

### Implications for Digital Literacy Theory and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for both digital literacy theory and practice. The context-dependent nature of digital literacy skills revealed in this research suggests that theoretical frameworks must move beyond generic digital competencies to address domain-specific challenges and opportunities. The unique characteristics of social media parenting advice, including the emphasis on authenticity over authority and the emotional stakes involved in parenting decisions, require specialized approaches that are not adequately addressed in existing digital literacy theory.

The study's findings also challenge the assumption that digital literacy education can be delivered through one-time interventions. The participants' articulated need for ongoing support and resources suggests that digital literacy in dynamic environments like social media requires continuous learning and adaptation. This finding has important implications for educational program design, suggesting that effective digital literacy interventions must incorporate mechanisms for ongoing support and community learning.<sup>(41)</sup>

The emergence of community verification systems as a desired intervention component suggests that digital literacy theory must evolve to incorporate collective intelligence approaches. Traditional frameworks that focus on individual critical evaluation skills may be insufficient for addressing the complex information environments that Gen Z parents navigate. The integration of peer wisdom with expert oversight represents a promising direction for future digital literacy interventions that has not been adequately explored in existing research.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into Gen Z parents' digital literacy needs and experiences, several limitations must be acknowledged. The focus on Indonesian participants limits the generalizability of findings to other cultural contexts, and future research should explore how cultural values and social media usage patterns influence digital literacy needs across different populations. Additionally, the study's qualitative methodology, while providing rich insights into participant experiences, limits the ability to quantify the prevalence of identified patterns or to establish causal relationships between digital literacy levels and parenting outcomes.

The study's findings suggest several important directions for future research, including the development and testing of community verification systems for parenting advice, longitudinal studies of how digital literacy skills evolve as parents gain experience, and comparative studies examining digital literacy needs across different generations of parents. Additionally, intervention studies that test the effectiveness of the proposed digital literacy model components would provide valuable evidence for practical implementation.

The unique contribution of this study lies in its demonstration that digital literacy in social media parenting contexts requires specialized frameworks that account for the emotional stakes, authenticity preferences, and community-oriented information seeking behaviors that characterize Gen Z parents. By moving beyond generic digital literacy competencies to examine domain-specific challenges and opportunities, this research provides a foundation for developing more effective and relevant digital literacy interventions for contemporary parents navigating the complex landscape of social media parenting advice.

### CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the use of social media, through its content, provides knowledge to Gen Z regarding parenting. They obtain a variety of information through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Gen Z, as parents who provide parenting, must also possess good digital literacy to appropriately apply the information obtained through social media. Gen Z parents should also have the skills and abilities to select appropriate content. The content presented through social media, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, must be carefully considered. This is certainly necessary so that Gen Z parents provide appropriate parenting for their children.

The novelty of this research lies in the fact that parenting using social media as a model can provide knowledge and implementation of appropriate parenting for children by Gen Z. In addition to advancing theory and practice, these findings contribute to efforts to provide positive parenting to children by Gen Z through social media. Future research should expand on this by developing social media-based parenting models that can be used by parents beyond Gen Z.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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