

Digital Mediation and Parental Anxiety: Restrictive Strategies in r/Parenting Discourse

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This study looks into parental digital mediation strategies through a qualitative thematic discourse analysis of 68 Reddit comments from r/Parenting. Using Nikken and Jansz's (2014) mediation framework and Furedi's (2002) concept of paranoid parenting, we explore both parental strategies and underlying anxieties. Empirical evidence shows that restrictive mediation dominates (46 out of 59 comments retained for analysis), with parents employing categorical exclusions such as social media bans and internet restrictions. Relational approaches like active mediation (n=3) and co-use (n=5) remain rare, pointing to a cultural framing of the internet as a risk rather than an opportunity. The study identifies three manifestations of paranoid parenting: catastrophic risk framing, moral superiority, and counter-expertise claims. Mediation strategies differ by family composition, with multi-child parents tending to demonstrate reflexive learning, whereas single-child parents often rely on anticipatory restrictions. These patterns indicate that digital parenting decisions are more influenced by fear than knowledge, with broader cultural expectations of intensive parenting reinforcing this behavior.

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