



NEGOTIATING DIGITAL AUTHORITY IN INDONESIAN FAMILIES WITH GENERATION ALPHA CHILDREN: PARENTAL MEDIATION, EMOTION REGULATION, AND CONFLICT

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Abstract

Scholarship on digital parental mediation typically evaluates restrictive, active, co-use, monitoring, and enabling strategies as ways to reduce media risk. In contrast, family emotion-regulation research foregrounds parental modeling, responses to children's emotions, and relational climate. The separation leaves a mechanistic problem unresolved. Similar digital rules may foster self-regulation in some children yet provoke conflict, covert use, or reliance on media for emotional soothing in others. Drawing on a critical integrative review and contextual secondary analysis of 26 verified academic and institutional sources, with particular attention to recent evidence on Indonesian families and Generation Alpha children, the article identifies relational conditions that shape mediation outcomes. The synthesis indicates that the effects of digital mediation are not inherent in the degree of restriction. Outcomes depend on rule consistency, explanatory quality, parental digital modeling, child participation, conflict-resolution climate, and the availability of emotional co-regulation. The article develops relational legitimacy in digital mediation as the extent to which technology rules are experienced as comprehensible, proportionate, reciprocal, and credible because parents also submit to the norms they impose. High relational legitimacy lets restriction serve as scaffolding for self-regulation, whereas low legitimacy turns restriction into a contest over authority. Indonesian evidence extends global scholarship by foregrounding norm implementation, negotiated hierarchy, and the gap between rule presence and compliance. The central contribution shifts analysis from strategy typologies to the relational mechanisms that determine whether digital mediation becomes regulatory learning or recurrent conflict.

Keywords: digital parental mediation; emotion regulation; Generation Alpha; parent-child conflict; digital parenting

INTRODUCTION

Digital families confront a paradox that screen-time metrics alone cannot adequately explain. Parents may impose time limits, inspect phones,

restrict applications, or discuss online risks, yet rules alone do not necessarily produce self-regulation. A UNICEF study across three Indonesian provinces interviewed

510 children aged 8-18. Nearly 70 percent reported parental rules governing online activity, 86.7 percent of the rules concerned time spent online, and 21.2 percent acknowledged noncompliance (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025, 8–11). The figures do not warrant a conclusion of parenting failure. They raise a more fundamental question instead. What enables digital rules to acquire normative force within parent-child relationships?

The question becomes more pressing as digital devices cease to function as external objects that parents can supervise. Phones and tablets are embedded in learning, friendship, entertainment, family communication, and emotional management. Research on media-based emotion regulation shows that parents sometimes use media to soothe difficult emotions (Coyne et al., 2021, art. 106762). Longitudinal evidence links early and persistent reliance on media for emotional soothing with higher levels of later problematic media use (Christensen-Duerden et al., 2026, art. 108979). Digital boundaries therefore extend beyond media-consumption policy. They enter the relationship among frustration, boredom, negotiation, compliance, autonomy, and a child's capacity to manage affective states without recurrent dependence on a device.

Parental mediation scholarship has moved well beyond treating media as a singular threat. Early research maps substantial variation

in parental strategies for children's internet use (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008, 581–599). A later conceptual critique redirects mediation theory from a narrow focus on media effects toward emotional work and child agency (Clark, 2011, 323–343). Subsequent scholarship distinguishes enabling and restrictive approaches while emphasizing the tension between online opportunities and risk exposure (Livingstone et al., 2017, 82–105). Measurement research further expands the repertoire to restrictive, enabling, and observant forms while exposing inconsistencies across mediation scales (Kuldas et al., 2021, 4062–4084). A richer taxonomy, however, does not by itself explain the mechanisms that make any strategy effective.

Mixed findings expose the limitation. A meta-analysis reports small overall associations between several forms of parental mediation and child outcomes (Collier et al., 2016, 798–812). A systematic review finds no single parental mediation strategy consistently associated with lower problematic online screen use and further links family cohesion with lower problematic use and family conflict with higher problematic use (Nielsen et al., 2019, 649–663). Strategy effects therefore appear inseparable from the family processes through which a strategy is enacted.

A second body of scholarship, centered on emotion regulation, supplies mechanisms that digital-

parenting research has not fully integrated. The tripartite family model locates children's emotion regulation within observational learning and modeling, emotion-related parenting practices, and the family emotional climate (Morris et al., 2007, 361–388). A complementary account emphasizes parental reactions to emotional expression, conversations about emotion, and parents' own emotional expression as bidirectional socialization pathways (Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998, 241–273). Applied to digital life, the analytical question extends beyond what parents prohibit. Attention must also fall on parental responses to a child's frustration when a device is removed, parental modeling of regulated use, and whether device-related conflict becomes an opportunity for regulatory learning or a trigger for affective escalation.

A third body of work places technology within the ecology of development. Neo-ecological theory extends bioecological thinking by treating the virtual microsystem as a genuine developmental setting (Navarro and Tudge, 2023, 19338–19354). This perspective disrupts the assumption that families inhabit an offline world later disrupted by an online world. Contemporary childhood unfolds across interwoven physical and virtual settings. Parental authority must therefore operate in environments with interactional properties unlike physical settings. Access may be private, content

moves rapidly, peers remain persistently available, and children may possess technical competence that exceeds parental knowledge. Formal parental authority therefore differs from the capacity to regulate digital behavior effectively.

The three literatures often proceed in parallel. Parental mediation asks which strategies parents use and what outcomes follow. Emotion-regulation research asks how families socialize affective management. Neo-ecological theory treats virtual space as a developmental environment. The unresolved problem is not a lack of research on digital parenting but an insufficient account of the relational processes connecting digital strategies to emotion regulation and conflict. A review of 144 studies shows the prominence of restrictive mediation while identifying parent-child knowledge gaps and parents' own digital activity as factors shaping practice (Nichols and Selim, 2022, art. 60). The intersection among rules, parental credibility, children's affective experience, and negotiated authority therefore requires a more explicit conceptual account.

Indonesian evidence renders the gap more visible. A thematic study identifies eight strategies used by Indonesian parents in relation to social media, including access restriction, interaction restriction, technical mediation, monitoring, interpretive mediation, supervision and co-use, modeling, and norm

implementation (Purboningsih et al., 2025, 2838–2859). A large parent survey finds five forms of parental mediation negatively associated with internet-addiction risk while acknowledging that parent-child relationship factors may operate as unmeasured mediators (Theopilus et al., 2026, 2311–2334). Qualitative evidence further shows that mediation strategies shift with age, behavior, and family relationships (Kaloka, Wulandari, and Rumeekar, 2023, 5439–5448). Instrument-adaptation research confirms the need for cultural sensitivity in measurement (Ulfa, Kendhawati, and Moeliono, 2025, 275–286). The literature offers an important empirical base, yet emotion regulation and the legitimacy of parental authority have rarely been integrated within a single explanatory model.

Generation Alpha requires careful use as an analytical label. A systematic review of 83 publications finds widespread assumptions of generational distinctiveness but limited evidence demonstrating unique generational differences (Höfrová, Balidemaj, and Small, 2024, art. 125). The term therefore functions here as a cohort marker for children growing up after smartphones, video platforms, online games, and digital communication became ordinary infrastructures of everyday life. No universal psychological characteristics are attributed to the cohort.

Parental mediation theory emerged from attempts to explain how parents reduce undesirable media effects through communication and regulation of use. Classical digital formulations distinguish active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-use. Parents commonly combine strategies, and restricting particular online interactions may reduce risk while other strategies do not produce equivalent effects (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008, 581–599). Later scholarship broadens the taxonomy by distinguishing enabling and restrictive mediation and identifying a trade-off: enabling mediation expands online opportunities while potentially increasing risk exposure (Livingstone et al., 2017, 82–105). A review of mediation scales finds inconsistent definitions and content validity across ten instruments and proposes restrictive, enabling, and observant mediation as broader categories (Kuldas et al., 2021, 4062–4084). The analytical difficulty is straightforward. Strategies are not stable units when definitions vary, and family practice routinely combines several forms.

A productive conceptual shift moves parental mediation away from protection techniques and toward emotional work and participatory learning (Clark, 2011, 323–343). Children are not passive recipients of rules. They interpret, respond to, test, and sometimes reshape parental practices. Digital mediation is therefore better understood as a

relational accomplishment in which rules gain effectiveness through repeated interaction. An application ban imposed after a prior conversation about risk carries a different meaning from a sudden ban introduced after parents notice declining school performance. The formal variable remains restriction, but the process producing compliance and internalization differs.

Emotion regulation refers to processes that influence which emotions arise, when they arise, and how they are experienced or expressed. The process model locates regulation at multiple points, from situation selection to response modulation (Gross, 2015, 1–26). Children do not develop regulatory capacity in isolation. Family research identifies parental modeling, emotion-related parenting practices, and family emotional climate as three principal pathways through which regulation develops (Morris et al., 2007, 361–388). A request to turn off a device can therefore become a learning episode. The child experiences frustration, the parent responds, the rule is explained or imposed, and the resulting conflict is either repaired or allowed to harden.

Co-regulation matters because children do not move directly from dependence to autonomous self-control. Parents provide external structure, emotional language, calm, and boundaries that children can gradually internalize. Digital media may support regulation in limited

circumstances, yet repeated use can also displace interpersonal co-regulation. Media-based emotion regulation in early childhood is associated with problematic media use and more intense emotional responses when media are removed (Coyne et al., 2021, art. 106762). Longitudinal evidence sharpens the temporal concern because reliance on media for emotional regulation generally declines between ages 2.5 and 7.5. At the same time, high and persistent early trajectories predict greater later problematic media use (Christensen-Duerden et al., 2026, art. 108979). The key issue, then, is not whether parents ever use media to soothe a child. Greater concern arises when media repeatedly replace opportunities to tolerate frustration and practice interpersonal co-regulation.

Neo-ecological theory helps explain why digital authority differs from authority in many other parenting domains. Physical and virtual microsystems differ because online interaction has its own actors, temporalities, and interactional properties (Navarro and Tudge, 2023, 19338–19354). Parents are not always present when children enter virtual spaces. Platforms supply algorithmic recommendations, peers remain accessible beyond school hours, and personal devices expand private space. Children may also possess technical knowledge unavailable to parents. Authority is therefore distributed across family relationships, platform design, peer

norms, schools, and individual competence.

A person-centered study demonstrates heterogeneous styles of digital parental mediation and identifies parental modeling as a meaningful differentiator across profiles (Navarro and Jensen, 2026, 481–501). Digital authority cannot consequently be reduced to control. Parents regulate technology while remaining technology users themselves. They restrict devices while working through phones and ask children to remain present in conversation while responding to notifications. The credibility of digital norms depends on the relationship between parental speech and parental practice. Relational legitimacy becomes analytically necessary at the junction between parental speech and parental practice.

Relational legitimacy in digital mediation is defined as the degree to which children recognize technology rules as norms worthy of compliance because the rule-making process is consistent, intelligible, proportionate, reciprocal, and embedded in emotionally responsive relationships. Legitimacy does not require child agreement with every rule. Parents retain protective responsibilities and may impose unilateral limits when risk is high. Instead, the concept concerns normative credibility and acceptability, enabling external boundaries to become internalized forms of self-control.

Six dimensions constitute the model. Consistency refers to stable application of rules across time and situations. Explanatory transparency concerns parents' capacity to provide age-appropriate reasons. Reciprocal modeling requires parents to practice digital discipline that matches the standards they demand of children. Participatory agency gives children space to provide information, negotiate safe details, and learn decision-making. Emotional availability refers to parental capacity to remain responsive when boundaries generate frustration. Proportionality requires the degree of control to correspond with age, competence, and level of risk. High relational legitimacy should increase the likelihood that restriction functions as scaffolding, while low legitimacy makes restriction easier to experience as arbitrary control.

The central argument is that digital mediation shapes emotion regulation primarily through the relational legitimacy of rules, not restriction intensity alone. Relational legitimacy emerges when children experience digital boundaries as consistent, explainable, proportionate, parent-modeled, open to age-appropriate participation, and enacted within relationships capable of containing emotion. Restriction under high legitimacy can scaffold self-regulation. Control under low legitimacy is more likely to become a struggle over authority, producing reactance and covert use.

The main research question asks how, and through what mechanisms, digital parental mediation shapes Generation Alpha emotion regulation while reconfiguring authority and conflict in Indonesian families. Three subsidiary questions guide the analysis. Under what conditions does restriction scaffold self-regulation rather than provoke resistance? How do modeling, consistency, explanation, and child participation shape the credibility of rules? What does the Indonesian case add to parental mediation theory developed largely in the Global North? After integrating parental mediation, emotional co-regulation, and neo-ecological theory in the introduction, the article explains the critical integrative review method and develops three connected analytical movements. The discussion examines restriction as co-regulation, the credibility of digital authority in family conflict, and relational legitimacy as an explanation for the difference between compliance and self-regulation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs a critical integrative literature review oriented toward theory construction and combines it with contextual secondary analysis of Indonesian findings. The design is appropriate because the research question does not seek a pooled estimate of a single effect. It seeks mechanisms that connect bodies of scholarship that have often remained separate. An

integrative approach permits quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, review-based, and institutional evidence to enter a common argument without treating their inferential strength as equivalent.

The core corpus comprises 26 sources published between 1998 and 2026. We retained four works published before 2014 because they are foundational to parental mediation and the socialization of emotion regulation. Most remaining sources were published between 2015 and 2026. Purposive selection combined title-based searches, DOI verification, publisher pages, PubMed and PMC where relevant to psychological research, and citation chaining from review articles and Indonesian studies. Articles with DOI identifiers were checked against publisher pages, reputable bibliographic indexes, or DOI metadata. Sources without DOI identifiers were retained only when traceable to academic journals or official institutions. We excluded sources solely because they appeared in a secondary reference list.

Inclusion criteria covered five domains. The first comprised parental mediation or digital parenting among children and adolescents. The second included emotion regulation or emotion socialization that could explain family mechanisms. The third covered parental technofence, parental modeling, and technology-related parent-child conflict. The

fourth included ecological approaches to digital development. The fifth comprised directly relevant Indonesian or Generation Alpha studies. Screen-time research that measured duration without a parenting component was not central to the corpus. Clinical addiction studies were used sparingly as indicators of digital outcomes rather than as substitutes for emotion regulation.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. Stage one mapped each source's claims, unit of analysis, mediation strategy, outcomes, and proposed mechanisms. Stage two used abductive thematic synthesis to identify patterns not explained by mediation typologies alone. Rather than preserving numerous disconnected themes, the synthesis organized evidence into three interlocking analytical clusters. The first combined restriction, co-regulation, and media use for emotional soothing. The second brought together parental modeling, technoference, inconsistency, conflict-resolution tactics, and norm implementation as sources of authority credibility. The third treated relational legitimacy as the mechanism differentiating compliance, self-regulation, relational disclosure, and covert use. Stage three placed all three clusters in dialogue with family emotion-regulation models and neo-ecological theory to construct relational legitimacy in digital mediation.

The design also requires explicit limits. The article reports no new interviews, surveys, or observations and therefore makes no claim to empirical novelty based on primary data. Its novelty is primarily interpretive and conceptual, supported by a synthetic reanalysis of verified empirical findings. The UNICEF study serves as contextual evidence rather than a nationally representative account because its sample came from Central Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025, 36). Generation Alpha likewise functions as a cohort marker rather than a causal variable. The resulting model is a theoretical proposition requiring dyadic and longitudinal testing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Restriction, Co-Regulation, and Emotion Regulation - Why Digital Rules Do Not Produce Uniform Effects

The most consistent finding across the synthesis is that restrictive mediation cannot be treated as an intervention with a single effect. A meta-analysis reports a small overall association between restrictive mediation and child outcomes (Collier et al., 2016, 798–812). A systematic review identifies variable relationships between parental mediation and problematic internet use and gaming (Nielsen et al., 2019, 649–663). Indonesian evidence appears different without being contradictory. A large parent survey finds both general and specific

restrictive mediation to be significant negative predictors of internet-addiction risk among children aged 7-11, alongside active mediation and supervision (Theopilus et al., 2026, 2311–2334). The divergence need not be forced into a binary choice between effective and ineffective restriction. A more plausible interpretation is that effects depend on family configuration, child age, the outcome being measured, and the relational manner in which a strategy is enacted.

Nominally identical strategies may contain very different social processes. A two-hour limit can operate as a stable boundary discussed before play begins, or it can function as an improvised punishment after parental anger. Monitoring may feel protective when reasons and privacy boundaries are clear, yet intrusive when parents access private messages without prior agreement. Strategy taxonomies assign identical labels to both situations even though the relational experience differs sharply. The limitation lies in treating the strategy category as more explanatory than the interaction through which the strategy acquires meaning.

Indonesian research reinforces the importance of process. Parents rarely use a single mediation strategy in isolation (Purboningsih et al., 2025, 2838–2859). Restriction is combined with interpretive mediation, supervision and co-use, modeling, and norm implementation.

Norm implementation matters because digital rules are embedded in broader family expectations rather than confined to technology use. Children's behavior is evaluated through values, duties, relationships, and time organization. A theory focused only on restriction frequency therefore misses the normative layer within which restriction becomes meaningful.

UNICEF evidence adds a useful tension. Nearly 70 percent of children in the study reported online rules, yet roughly one fifth acknowledged noncompliance. The same report associates better parent-child relationships with greater willingness to share online activity, while some children maintained secret accounts from parents (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025, 8–11). The association does not establish a causal effect of relationship quality on compliance, but it weakens any assumption that rule presence alone adequately measures mediation. Open compliance, relational disclosure, and covert use represent distinct responses to digital authority.

Relational legitimacy offers a more precise interpretation. Restriction can support self-regulation when children can anticipate boundaries, understand their rationale, and observe parents practicing comparable norms. Children then learn to anticipate transitions from online to offline activity, delay gratification, and tolerate frustration in a secure

environment. Restriction loses pedagogical value when it signals unstable power. Under low-legitimacy conditions, children may devote energy to reading parental mood, avoiding detection, or winning negotiations rather than learning to regulate use.

The theoretical implication changes the question researchers should ask. Inquiry should move away from searching for a universally superior mediation strategy and toward testing interactions between strategy type and relational legitimacy. Restrictive mediation should predict stronger self-regulation when consistency, relationship quality, and parental modeling are high. Protective effects may weaken or reverse when rules are inconsistent or conflict is resolved aggressively. Preliminary evidence shows that the association between inconsistent media mediation and problematic smartphone use among preschool children becomes stronger when mothers employ negative conflict-resolution tactics, including psychological aggression and physical assault (Yang et al., 2022, art. 816).

Dependence on relational process becomes clearer when analysis shifts from the rule itself to the child's emotional experience during enforcement. Digital mediation intersects most directly with emotion regulation when devices are used to stop crying, anger, boredom, or anxiety.

Moralistic readings often portray such use as parental surrender to screens, but developmental analysis requires a sharper distinction. Occasional media use during travel, medical procedures, or unusually demanding circumstances does not equal making a device the child's primary regulator. Developmental concern grows when repeated reliance on devices reduces opportunities to name emotions, wait, seek interpersonal support, change coping strategies, or calm the body without digital stimulation.

Media-based emotion regulation is associated with problematic media use in early childhood, while child temperament partly shapes how often parents rely on media for soothing (Coyne et al., 2021, art. 106762). Causal direction is therefore likely bidirectional. A more reactive child may elicit greater device use, while repeated device-based soothing may strengthen the expectation that discomfort should be immediately displaced. Longitudinal evidence supports a process account because high and persistent early trajectories of media-based emotion regulation are associated with greater later problematic media use (Christensen-Duerden et al., 2026, art. 108979). The findings are more analytically useful when framed as displacement of interpersonal co-regulation rather than as an argument for technology prohibition.

The family model clarifies what may be displaced when media substitute for interpersonal

regulation (Morris et al., 2007, 361–388). Children learn regulation by observing how parents manage stress, experiencing parental responses to emotion, and participating in a family climate that organizes conflict. When every episode of digital frustration is resolved by another device, such as replacing a stopped game with a video, external structure may reduce short-term emotional activation without providing practice in tolerating transition. Parents who maintain a boundary while helping children identify disappointment provide situational control and affective support. Together, they form a form of co-regulation.

The process model adds temporal precision to regulating digital transitions (Gross, 2015, 1–26). Parents can shape situations before conflict arises by establishing routines, modifying transitions with warnings, redirecting attention to alternative activities, supporting reappraisal of why play must end, or helping modulate responses after anger has already intensified. Digital mediation introduced only at the final stage, after emotional activation is high, is more likely to become conflictual. Family intervention should therefore reduce reliance on confiscation after escalation and strengthen anticipatory structuring before emotion peaks.

The authority link is consequential. Children are more likely to experience a boundary as predictable when digital transitions

include routines, warnings, and consistent enforcement. Legitimacy does not eliminate disappointment; it gives disappointment a structure you can manage. From a developmental perspective, the goal of mediation is not permanent calm whenever access ends. The goal is repeated exposure to situations in which strong emotion can be experienced without damaging the relationship or resorting to automatic digital suppression. Emotion regulation develops through successfully managed tension rather than through the absence of tension.

Research in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions associates parenting style with emotion regulation among Generation Alpha students. It identifies parenting style as a partial mediator of demographic influences (Ma'ruf et al., 2025, art. 2511448). The study does not examine digital mediation and therefore cannot serve as direct evidence for the present mechanism. Its value lies in confirming that parenting characteristics remain part of the emotional-regulation context in Indonesia. Digital rules should therefore be interpreted alongside parental responsiveness, emotional support, and everyday relationship quality.

The Credibility of Digital Authority through Modeling, Technoference, Inconsistency, and Family Conflict

Digital authority contains a reflexive difficulty that appears with unusual intensity in technology-

related parenting. Parents regulate behaviors they also perform every day. They may ask children to put phones away during meals while answering work messages at the same table. They may prohibit late-night scrolling while checking social media in bed. The discrepancy does not automatically amount to hypocrisy because adult and child needs differ. However, unexplained asymmetry and the absence of self-directed parental boundaries can erode the credibility of family norms.

A scoping review of 64 studies links parental technoference to changes in parent-child interaction and a range of relational and developmental outcomes (Komanchuk et al., 2023, 579–603). Caution remains necessary because study designs vary and many reported relationships are associative. Even so, recurring evidence that parental devices interrupt responsiveness identifies an important mechanism. Children learn from more than explicit rules. They also learn from parental availability when they need attention. When devices routinely override bids for contact, the implicit hierarchy of digital priorities may contradict the rules parents verbalize.

Modeling is therefore not an ancillary component. Mediation through modeling helps differentiate profiles of digital parental mediation (Navarro and Jensen, 2026, 481–501). Within a relational-legitimacy framework, modeling is reciprocal. Parents need not have the same

screen-time limits as children. However, they do need rules for their own use, explanations for legitimate exceptions, and willingness to acknowledge conduct that contradicts family norms. Authority becomes more credible when people do not treat differences in power as unlimited moral exemptions.

Inconsistency also operates at the level of decision-making. A game may be allowed for two hours on one day, prohibited the next because a parent is exhausted, and extended again later to keep the household quiet. Family rules cannot be mechanically rigid, and flexibility is necessary. The difference between flexibility and inconsistency lies in whether changes remain explainable and predictable. Flexible rules retain an intelligible logic; inconsistent rules fluctuate with mood or immediate conflict. Inconsistent mediation becomes more problematic when combined with harsh conflict-resolution tactics (Yang et al., 2022, art. 816). The combination signals a deficit of structure alongside a deficit of emotional security.

A dyadic study of Korean families highlights discrepancies between parent and child perceptions (Lee et al., 2026, 674–684). The identified profiles of digital parenting include controlling, engaging, uninvolved, and inconsistent patterns based on agreement or disagreement between mothers and children. This has substantial implications for research

in Indonesia. Many parental mediation studies rely on parent reports, yet a rule a parent describes as explanatory may not be experienced as such by a child. Relational legitimacy is fundamentally intersubjective and therefore requires measurement from both sides of the relationship.

Future measurement should pair mediation-strategy scales with indicators of consistency, perceived fairness, explanatory quality, parental modeling, emotional availability, and child voice. Parent-child discrepancy can provide an important indicator, although analysis should move beyond simple difference scores. Response-surface methods or latent-profile approaches could test whether a configuration in which parents perceive dialogue but children perceive control produces different outcomes from a configuration in which both parties experience the rules as dialogical. Conflict can then function as evidence about the legitimacy of authority rather than as statistical noise.

Credibility is not produced by individual parental behavior alone. Family value systems define obligation, compliance, protection, and the boundaries of child negotiation. Evidence on technoference and inconsistency must therefore be read together with the cultural context in which digital rules acquire meaning. Indonesian families show particularly clearly why technical categories of parental

mediation can miss the normative layer through which authority is interpreted.

Much parental mediation research draws on concepts developed in the Global North. Indonesian research explicitly addresses the limitation and identifies norm implementation among parental strategies alongside more familiar restrictive and enabling categories (Purboningsih et al., 2025, 2838–2859). The finding does not imply a homogeneous Indonesian parenting culture. Families vary by class, religion, region, education, household configuration, and access to technology. The analytical significance lies instead in the possibility that digital rules are often embedded in a broader order of obligations involving study, worship, family relationships, courtesy, and domestic responsibilities. Technical categories alone do not fully capture the meaning of such rules.

Research on parents of Generation Alpha after the pandemic identifies both active and restrictive mediation and documents shifts in strategy as children develop and relationship circumstances change (Kaloka, Wulandari, and Rumezar, 2023, 5439–5448). The evidence supports an understanding of mediation as an adaptive process. As children grow older, authority based primarily on physical access to devices loses part of its force. Children gain competence, peer networks, personal accounts, and

private digital spaces. Parents therefore need to shift authority from direct control to a combination of structure, knowledge, trust, and dialogue.

UNICEF data reveal another productive paradox. Online rules are widespread, especially time-based rules, yet some children remain noncompliant. The study summary also reports that 51 percent of children spoke to no one about their online activity, while better parent-child relationships were associated with greater openness (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025, 8–11). Compliance therefore cannot function as the sole outcome of successful mediation. Children may obey out of fear of sanctions while concealing risk, or they may violate minor limits while remaining willing to disclose serious threats. From a digital-safety perspective, relational disclosure can be as consequential as reducing screen time.

Indonesian evidence also complicates simplified assumptions about Asian family hierarchy. Hierarchy is not necessarily incompatible with dialogue. Parents may retain final authority while providing explanation and age-appropriate participation. Dialogue, conversely, does not require fully egalitarian power relations. Relational legitimacy deliberately avoids making power symmetry a prerequisite. The relevant question is whether authority is predictable, reasoned, responsive, and consistent with the norms parents demand.

Such a formulation is better suited to cross-cultural comparison than treating Western-style autonomy support as the only standard of legitimate parenting.

Instrument-adaptation research demonstrates the need for cultural sensitivity when measuring parental mediation in Indonesia (Ulfa, Kendhawati, and Moeliono, 2025, 275–286). The next step should move beyond translating additional scales and examine whether core constructs are conceptually equivalent. Monitoring, for example, may be interpreted as care, control, or protective obligation depending on age and context. Norm implementation may connect digital rules with family identity. Ignoring such layers of meaning can produce cross-national comparisons that are statistically neat yet socially shallow.

Indonesia therefore speaks back to global scholarship in two ways. First, parental mediation strategies need to be located within the moral ecology of family life, not technology alone. Second, widespread rules coexisting with noncompliance and secret accounts require distinguishing formal authority from relational legitimacy. Global theory gains explanatory power when it incorporates both dimensions, particularly in societies where family obligation and hierarchy remain strong while digital life expands children's practical agency.

From Compliance to Self-Regulation through a Relational Legitimacy Model

The synthesis yields a five-stage model in which mediation strategy shapes relational experience, relational experience shapes perceived legitimacy, legitimacy channels regulation or conflict, and the pathway produces digital outcomes. Mediation strategies include restriction, active discussion, co-use, monitoring, supervision, enabling mediation, and modeling. None operates directly. Children experience strategies through consistency, explanatory transparency, proportionality, modeling, emotional availability, and participation. Relational experiences shape perceived legitimacy, which in turn affects whether external boundaries are internalized as self-regulation or answered through superficial compliance, conflict, avoidance, and covert use.

Six propositions follow from the model. P1 predicts a more positive association between restrictive mediation and self-regulation when relational legitimacy is high. P2 predicts that inconsistent mediation will be associated with conflict and problematic use especially when emotional availability is low and conflict-resolution tactics are harsh. P3 predicts that parental modeling will strengthen the relationship between explanatory mediation and perceived legitimacy. P4 predicts that child participation will become more consequential as age and

digital competence increase because parental technical control loses relative effectiveness. P5 predicts that persistent media-based emotion regulation will weaken the pathway from external boundaries to self-regulation when devices routinely replace interpersonal co-regulation. P6 predicts that parent-child relationship quality will explain disclosure of online risk more strongly than monitoring frequency alone.

The propositions reconcile findings that otherwise appear contradictory. Studies reporting benefits of restriction can be interpreted as contexts in which restriction operates alongside structure and support. Mixed effects may reflect unmeasured variation in legitimacy. Research on technoference explains how explicit rules can lose credibility through contradictory parental modeling. Research on media-based emotion regulation shows how devices enter affective mechanisms rather than merely consumption behavior. Dyadic evidence explains why parent reports alone can be insufficient.

The model also separates three outcomes that are frequently conflated. Compliance means following external rules in a particular situation. Self-regulation means managing use and emotion when supervision decreases. Relational disclosure means willingness to reveal online experiences, including violations or risks, to parents. A family may score

high on one outcome and low on another. Strict restriction may increase compliance while reducing disclosure when children fear punishment. Warm dialogue may increase disclosure while still requiring boundaries when self-regulatory capacity remains limited. Interventions centered only on screen time therefore risk overlooking two equally important outcomes.

Distinguishing the outcomes also explains why conflict is not always synonymous with failure. Mild conflict followed by repair can accompany the development of autonomy, especially as children become more capable of evaluating risk and articulating reasons. More diagnostic features include the form and frequency of conflict, the capacity for repair, and the relational aftermath. Conflict followed by explanation, recognition of emotion, and revision of rule details can strengthen legitimacy. Threats, humiliation, indefinite confiscation, or covert surveillance are more likely to encourage avoidance. The model therefore predicts a nonlinear relationship. An absence of conflict is not necessarily ideal, while chronic unresolved conflict indicates failure to transform mediation into self-regulation.

Age changes the relative weight of each legitimacy dimension. In early childhood, consistency, routine, and emotional availability are likely to dominate because abstract reasoning remains limited. During the school years, explanatory

transparency and opportunities to practice decision-making matter more. As children approach adolescence, proportionality and participatory agency gain weight as digital space becomes increasingly tied to friendship, identity, and privacy. Developmental calibration avoids two symmetrical errors. Parents can grant more autonomy than regulatory capacity can support, or they can retain early-childhood forms of control after children have developed competencies requiring a different form of negotiation.

Operationally, relational legitimacy should not be reduced to a single moral score. Its six dimensions can form distinct profiles. One family may be consistent but weak in explanation; another may be dialogical but weak in modeling; a third may be emotionally responsive yet insufficiently proportionate to risk. Latent-profile analysis could test whether particular configurations predict outcomes more effectively than a total score. A profile approach is consistent with person-centered evidence showing heterogeneity in digital parental mediation and limited correspondence with conventional parenting typologies.

The model also requires separating content risk from relational risk. Rapid intervention and strong control may be warranted in situations involving sexual contact, extortion, unauthorized transactions, or direct safety threats, even when room for negotiation

temporarily narrows. Protective authority, however, does not eliminate the need for relational repair after a crisis. Parents still need to explain reasons, restore communication, and recalibrate boundaries so that emergency surveillance does not become a permanent regime of control. The distinction prevents relational legitimacy from being misread as an obligation to negotiate every circumstance while also preventing safety risk from becoming a blanket justification for unlimited control over ordinary digital life.

The practical implication is not permissive parenting. Generation Alpha children still require structure, particularly around risky content, financial transactions, contact with strangers, sleep, and use that disrupts daily functioning. The key difference concerns the purpose of structure. Effective authority should be evaluated by its capacity to convert external boundaries into a child's decision-making capacity when parents are absent, rather than by a parent's capacity to win every conflict. Relational legitimacy therefore operates as an educational mechanism.

For family research, the model opens stronger empirical designs. Longitudinal studies could measure mediation strategies, child-perceived legitimacy, emotion regulation, conflict frequency, disclosure, and problematic media use across multiple waves. Dyadic data should receive priority. Experience-

sampling methods could capture conflict during actual device transitions so that affective mechanisms are not reconstructed solely from global memory. Cross-cultural comparison could test whether the six legitimacy dimensions remain stable across Indonesia, Korea, Europe, and the United States while allowing locally meaningful indicators such as norm implementation to emerge as substantive variation.

CONCLUSION

The central research question asks how digital parental mediation shapes Generation Alpha emotion regulation while reconfiguring authority and conflict in Indonesian families. The literature synthesis indicates that mediation strategies do not operate as techniques with fixed effects. Restriction, monitoring, active mediation, co-use, enabling mediation, and modeling take on meaning through the relational processes surrounding their implementation. Families construct the meaning of rules through consistency, explanation, modeling, child participation, emotional responses, and conflict-resolution strategies.

The central thesis can be stated in one sentence. Digital mediation influences emotion regulation primarily through the relational legitimacy of rules, not restriction intensity alone. High legitimacy allows external boundaries to function as scaffolding. Children

learn to anticipate transitions, delay gratification, tolerate frustration, and make decisions beyond direct supervision. Low legitimacy turns boundaries into arenas of control and increases the likelihood of superficial compliance, reactance, conflict, or covert use.

The article's empirical contribution is synthetic rather than based on new primary data. Indonesian evidence documents combinations of restrictive and enabling strategies, norm implementation, a strong emphasis on time rules, and a persistent gap between rule presence and compliance. Research involving children aged 7-11 also identifies protective associations between several mediation strategies and internet-addiction risk without fully explaining the relational mechanism involved. UNICEF findings further suggest that children's willingness to disclose online activity is linked to relationship quality, which means digital safety cannot be evaluated solely through reductions in duration of use.

The theoretical contribution lies in relational legitimacy in digital mediation and in a pathway model linking strategy, relational experience, legitimacy, regulation or conflict, and digital outcomes. The model extends parental mediation theory by incorporating mechanisms from emotion-socialization research and neo-ecological theory. It also complicates the assumption that restriction and dialogue occupy

opposite poles. Restriction can be dialogical and legitimate, while dialogue can remain cosmetic when decisions fluctuate unpredictably or parents fail to model the norms they demand.

The contribution to global scholarship lies in treating Indonesia as a source of theoretical correction rather than a mere research site. Typologies developed in the Global North need greater sensitivity to family moral ecologies, norm implementation, and hierarchical forms of authority that can remain responsive. Child agency also need not imply equality of power. In many families, agency is better understood as a child's capacity to provide information, understand reasons, voice objections, and participate in implementation details while protective responsibility remains with parents.

The implications for family intervention are concrete. Digital-parenting programs should stop treating screen-time limits as the sole indicator of success. Training should address predictable rule formation, age-appropriate explanation, transition practices before device removal, parental digital modeling, technofence management, and responses to children's emotions. Evaluation should include self-regulation and disclosure, not compliance alone.

The review's limitations delimit the claims. A critical integrative review does not produce a pooled effect estimate and does not

guarantee exhaustive coverage comparable with a preregistered systematic review. The Indonesian corpus remains smaller than scholarship from the Global North, many studies rely on self-report, and truly dyadic studies pairing parent and child perceptions remain limited. Generation Alpha should not be treated as a causal explanation for psychological difference. Relational legitimacy therefore remains an analytical proposition requiring construct validation and causal testing.

Future research should develop a scale of relational legitimacy in digital mediation, test measurement invariance across cultures, and incorporate the construct into dyadic longitudinal designs. Indonesian research is especially well positioned to examine interactions among norm implementation, intergenerational authority, religion-informed family norms, social class, digital competence gaps, and children's willingness to disclose online experiences. Observational and experience-sampling designs are also needed to capture what occurs during the minutes when digital boundaries are actually enforced.

The central challenge for digital families is not producing perfect obedience when a screen is turned off. The deeper task is sustaining parental authority that remains credible enough to be internalized after direct supervision ends and while screens, peers, and platforms remain present.

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