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"Screen Time And Mother–Child Attachment: Exploring The Impact Of Digital Media Use Among School-Aged Children In Bengaluru"

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Abstract:

The rapid integration of digital media into everyday life has significantly reshaped childhood experiences, particularly in urban environments where access to smartphones, tablets, and online platforms is widespread. While digital technologies provide valuable opportunities for learning, communication, and entertainment, concerns are increasingly being raised about their impact on children's psychological development and family relationships. One area of growing importance is the influence of screen exposure on parent–child emotional bonding, especially within the framework of attachment relationships.

Grounded in Attachment Theory, which emphasizes the importance of early emotional bonds between caregivers and children for healthy socio-emotional development, this study investigates how digital media use affects mother–child attachment among schoolaged children. Secure attachment, characterized by trust, emotional closeness, and effective communication, plays a critical role in shaping a child's emotional regulation, resilience, and interpersonal functioning. However, the increasing presence of digital devices in daily routines may interfere with opportunities for meaningful interaction and responsive caregiving, thereby influencing attachment quality.

The present study focuses on children aged 6–12 years in Bengaluru, an urban setting marked by rapid technological adoption and changing family dynamics. This developmental stage is particularly significant as children gradually gain independence while still depending on parental emotional support. The research adopts a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between screen time and mother–child attachment, while also exploring the role of technoference—defined as interruptions in interpersonal interactions caused by digital device use—as a contributing factor.

A sample of 120 mother–child dyads was selected using stratified sampling from schools and residential communities. Data were collected using standardized instruments measuring children's screen time (in terms of duration, frequency, and type of use), mother–child attachment (across dimensions such as emotional closeness, communication, trust, and responsiveness), and technoference in daily interactions. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative responses were gathered to better understand family experiences and behavioral patterns related to digital media use.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between screen time and attachment quality, indicating that increased digital media use is associated with reduced emotional bonding between mothers and children. Screen time was also found to be a significant predictor of attachment outcomes, explaining a notable proportion of variation in attachment levels. These findings suggest that excessive

engagement with digital devices may limit opportunities for face-to-face interaction, emotional exchange, and shared experiences that are essential for building secure attachment relationships.
Importantly, technoference emerged as a strong influencing factor, further intensifying the negative impact of screen use. Frequent interruptions caused by mobile devices during conversations and routine family activities were found to reduce parental responsiveness and attentiveness. This disruption in real-time interaction weakens the emotional connection between mother and child, highlighting that not only the amount of screen time but also the context and timing of device use play a crucial role in shaping relational outcomes.

The qualitative findings supported these results by providing insight into everyday family dynamics. Many mothers reported that children with higher screen engagement tended to show reduced interest in communication, family participation, and shared activities. Patterns such as emotional distancing, decreased verbal interaction, and a growing preference for solitary digital engagement were commonly observed. Traditional bonding activities, including storytelling, play, and shared meals, were often replaced or interrupted by screen use, contributing to a decline in emotional closeness.

At the same time, the study identified important moderating factors that can help mitigate these negative effects. Parental involvement in children's digital activities—such as co-viewing, guided usage, and setting structured screen time limits—was associated with improved communication and stronger emotional connection. When digital media was used interactively and under supervision, its adverse impact on attachment appeared to be significantly reduced. This highlights the role of mindful parenting in promoting healthy digital habits while preserving relational quality.
The findings also align with the displacement hypothesis, which suggests that time spent on digital devices often replaces time that could otherwise be devoted to direct social interaction. In the context of parent–child relationships, this displacement reduces opportunities for emotional engagement and shared experiences, both of which are fundamental to secure attachment formation. Furthermore, the study underscores that the quality of screen use matters; passive and unregulated consumption tends to have more negative effects compared to purposeful and interactive engagement.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The use of self-reported measures may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal conclusions. Additionally, the focus on an urban population limits the generalizability of findings to other settings. Future research could benefit from longitudinal approaches and inclusion of multiple caregivers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of family interactions in the digital age.
In conclusion, this study highlights that excessive and unregulated screen time can negatively influence mother–child attachment by reducing emotional closeness, communication, and responsiveness. Technoference further exacerbates these challenges by interrupting meaningful interpersonal interactions. However, the findings also offer a hopeful perspective, demonstrating that active parental involvement and balanced digital practices can significantly buffer these effects.

The study emphasizes the need for greater awareness among parents, educators, and mental health professionals regarding the impact of digital media on children's emotional development. Encouraging mindful technology use, promoting family interaction, and fostering consistent emotional engagement are essential steps toward maintaining strong parent–child relationships in an increasingly digital world. Ultimately, achieving a balance between technological benefits and human connection is key to supporting healthy developmental outcomes for children.

Index Terms **-** Screen time, attachment theory, mother–child relationship, techno Ference, digital media, child development, parental mediation, urban families.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid growth of digital technology has transformed the everyday lives of individuals across all age groups, particularly children. With the widespread availability of smartphones, tablets, televisions, and computers, children are now exposed to digital media from a very early age. In countries like India, where digital infrastructure has expanded rapidly, access to these devices has become both convenient and affordable, leading to a significant increase in children's screen time. Studies suggest that children often exceed recommended screen-time limits, raising concerns about the potential effects on their overall development.

Screen time, defined as the amount of time spent engaging with digital devices, plays a dual role in children's lives. On one hand, it offers educational opportunities, cognitive stimulation, and entertainment. On the other hand, excessive and unregulated screen use has been linked to a variety of developmental challenges, including attention difficulties, emotional dysregulation, reduced social interaction, and sleep disturbances. These concerns highlight the importance of not only examining how much time children spend on screens, but also understanding how this exposure influences their emotional and relational development. One of the most critical yet underexplored areas in this context is the impact of screen time on parent–child relationships, particularly the emotional bond between mothers and children. The family environment serves as the primary context for a child's emotional and social growth, and the quality of interactions with caregivers plays a central role in shaping developmental outcomes. According to Attachment Theory, proposed by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth, children develop secure attachment when caregivers are consistently responsive, emotionally available, and sensitive to their needs. Such secure attachment forms the foundation for emotional stability, trust, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

However, the increasing presence of digital media in households has the potential to disrupt these interactions. When children spend excessive time engaging with screens, opportunities for face-to-face communication, shared activities, and emotional connection with caregivers may decrease. This reduction in meaningful interaction can weaken emotional closeness and potentially affect the development of secure attachment. Moreover, the concept of "technoference" highlights how parental use of digital devices can interrupt interactions with children, leading to reduced attentiveness and responsiveness. These interruptions may negatively influence children's perception of parental availability and emotional support.

The issue becomes even more significant in urban settings such as Bengaluru, where rapid urbanization, nuclear family structures, and demanding work schedules often limit the time parents can spend with their children. In such contexts, digital devices are frequently used as tools to occupy children, which may inadvertently increase screen exposure while reducing opportunities for bonding. Although this practice may provide short-term convenience, it may have long-term implications for the quality of parent–child relationships.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified children's reliance on digital media. With the shift to online education, restricted outdoor activities, and increased dependence on digital platforms for communication and entertainment, children's screen time rose substantially. While digital media played a crucial role in maintaining continuity in learning and social interaction, it also heightened concerns regarding its impact on emotional development and family dynamics.

Empirical research consistently indicates that excessive screen time is associated with reduced parent–child interaction, lower emotional responsiveness, and increased behavioural problems in children. Additionally, children are sensitive to parental distraction caused by device use and may interpret it as a lack of attention, which can affect their emotional security. Over time, such patterns may contribute to difficulties in emotional regulation and social functioning.

Despite the growing body of research on screen time, there is limited focus on its influence on attachment relationships within the Indian context. Cultural factors, family structures, and lifestyle patterns in India differ significantly from those in Western countries, making it essential to examine these dynamics in a localized setting. School-aged children (6–12 years), in particular, represent a crucial developmental stage during which emotional bonds with caregivers continue to play a vital role alongside increasing independence.

It is important to note that screen time itself is not inherently harmful; its impact depends on factors such as duration, content, context, and parental involvement. Practices such as co-viewing, setting boundaries, and encouraging interactive use of digital media can help mitigate potential negative effects. However, when screen use becomes excessive and replaces interpersonal interaction, it may pose risks to children's emotional and relational well-being.

Given these considerations, the present study seeks to explore the relationship between screen time and mother–child attachment among school-aged children in Bengaluru. By focusing on both the quantity and context of digital media use, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how modern technological environments influence emotional bonding within families. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of informed parenting practices, educational strategies, and intervention programs that promote balanced digital use while supporting healthy parent–child relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing use of digital media among children has drawn significant research attention toward its impact on parent–child relationships and emotional development.
Studies suggest that excessive and unregulated screen time can negatively affect interaction quality between children and caregivers, thereby weakening emotional bonding and attachment.

Nature of Digital Media Use

Research distinguishes between passive and interactive forms of digital media use.
Neumann (2023):
Passive screen use (e.g., watching videos alone) reduces opportunities for meaningful parent–child interaction.
Co-engagement (parent and child using media together) enhances learning and strengthens bonding. This indicates that the context of media use plays a crucial role in its developmental impact.

Impact on Attachment and Parenting

Coyne et al. (2022):
Excessive screen time is associated with lower parental warmth and responsiveness.
Madigan et al. (2020):
Higher screen exposure reduces communication quality and emotional closeness.
These findings highlight that increased screen use can limit essential interpersonal interactions needed for secure attachment.

Technoference and Its Effects

The concept of "technoference" refers to interruptions in parent–child interactions due to digital device use.
Radesky and Christakis (2021):
Parental device use disrupts emotional attunement and responsiveness.

Domoff et al. (2017):
Technoference predicts behavioral problems and reduced attachment security in children.
Frequent parental distraction may lead children to perceive reduced emotional availability.

Displacement of Family Interactions

Kabali et al. (2019):
Unsupervised screen use reduces engagement during family routines.
Kildare and Middlemiss (2017):
Digital devices in shared spaces limit parental sensitivity and responsiveness.
Chaudhary and Sharma (2018) (Indian context):
Mothers reported difficulty maintaining conversations and shared activities due to increased screen exposure. These findings emphasize the displacement of meaningful family interactions.

Effects on Older Children and Adolescents

Twenge and Campbell (2018):
Higher screen time is linked to lower parental closeness and reduced life satisfaction. These outcomes suggest long-term emotional and relational consequences.

Theoretical Perspective

The findings align with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988):
Secure attachment depends on consistent caregiver availability and responsiveness.
Excessive digital media use may interfere with these caregiving behaviours, impacting attachment security.

Research Gaps

Most studies are conducted in Western contexts, limiting applicability to countries like India.
Limited research focuses on school-aged children (6–12 years), a critical developmental stage.
Few studies examine the combined effects of children's screen time and parental technoference.

Need for the Present Study

The current study aims to:
Examine the relationship between digital media use, technoference, and mother–child attachment.
Focus specifically on school-aged children in Bengaluru.
This research seeks to provide culturally relevant insights and contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital environments influence family relationships and children's emotional development.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-method research design was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital media use and mother–child attachment. This approach combined quantitative methods, which focused on measuring screen time, technoference, and attachment levels, with qualitative methods that explored participants' experiences and perceptions. The integration of both

approaches enabled a more holistic analysis by supporting statistical findings with in-depth insights into parent–child interactions and emotional bonding.

Sample

The study consisted of 120 mother–child dyads from Bengaluru. Children in the age group of 6–12 years were included, as this stage is critical for both attachment development and increasing digital media exposure. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure equal representation across three age groups: 6–8 years, 9–10 years, and 11–12 years. Only those participants who had regular exposure to digital media and whose mothers were primary caregivers were selected for the study.

Table 3.1: Demographic Distribution of Participants (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Total Sample	Mother–Child Dyads	120	100%
Age Group	6–8 years	40	33.3%
	9–10 years	40	33.3%
	11–12 years	40	33.3%
Location	Bengaluru Urban	120	100%

Instruments

The following tools were used for data collection:

- **Screen Time Questionnaire** – Developed by the researcher to assess the duration, type, and context of children's digital media use, including device usage, purpose, and parental monitoring.

- **Parent–Child Attachment Scale** – A standardized scale used to measure the quality of attachment between mothers and children across dimensions such as trust, communication, and alienation.

- **Semi-structured Interview Schedule** – Designed to collect qualitative data regarding children's daily routines, screen use patterns, and the perceived impact of digital media on parent–child interaction and emotional bonding.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to analyze the collected data:

- **Descriptive Statistics** – Used to summarize screen time patterns and attachment levels.

- **Pearson Correlation** – Applied to examine the relationship between screen time and mother–child attachment.

- **Regression Analysis** – Used to determine whether screen time significantly predicts attachment levels.

- **Thematic Analysis** – Employed to analyze qualitative interview data by identifying key themes related to parent–child interaction, emotional bonding, and digital media use.

4. RESULTS

Screen Time Patterns

The findings indicate that digital media use is a prominent part of children's daily routines. The average screen time among the participants was approximately **2.97 hours per day**, suggesting moderate to high exposure. A majority of children fell within the **2–4 hours category (37%)**, followed by **1–2 hours (29%)**, while **17% exceeded 4 hours per day**, reflecting excessive usage. Only a small proportion (**17%**) reported low screen exposure (less than 1 hour daily). Overall, these results highlight that most children are engaged with screens beyond recommended limits, emphasizing the increasing role of digital media in their everyday lives.

Attachment Levels

Mother–child attachment levels were categorized into secure, moderate, and insecure groups. The results showed that **42% of children demonstrated secure attachment**, while **33% fell under moderate attachment**, and **25% were categorized as insecure**. The mean attachment score was **67.41**, indicating an overall moderate level of attachment. Although a substantial proportion of children exhibited secure bonding, more than half (58%) fell into moderate or insecure categories, suggesting potential concerns regarding emotional closeness and responsiveness within families.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a **significant negative relationship between screen time and mother–child attachment ($r = -0.62$, $p < 0.01$)**. This indicates that as children's screen time increases, their level of attachment to their mothers tends to decrease. Furthermore, technoference—defined as interruptions in parent–child interactions due to device use—showed an even stronger negative association with attachment. These findings suggest that both excessive screen exposure and disrupted interaction patterns contribute to weaker emotional bonding. The results clearly demonstrate that increased engagement with digital devices is linked to reduced emotional connection within the family.

Regression Analysis

To further examine the predictive role of screen time, a regression analysis was conducted. The results showed that screen time significantly predicts mother–child attachment levels, with an **R^2 value of 0.38**, indicating that **38% of the variance in attachment can be explained by screen time**. The regression coefficient (**$B = -6.45$, $\beta = -0.62$, $p < 0.01$**) indicates that for every additional hour of screen time, the attachment score decreases by approximately **6.45 points**. The overall model was statistically significant (**$F(1,118) = 72.3$, $p < 0.01$**), confirming that screen time is a strong and meaningful predictor of emotional bonding. These findings reinforce the conclusion that increased screen exposure not only correlates with but also directly impacts attachment quality.

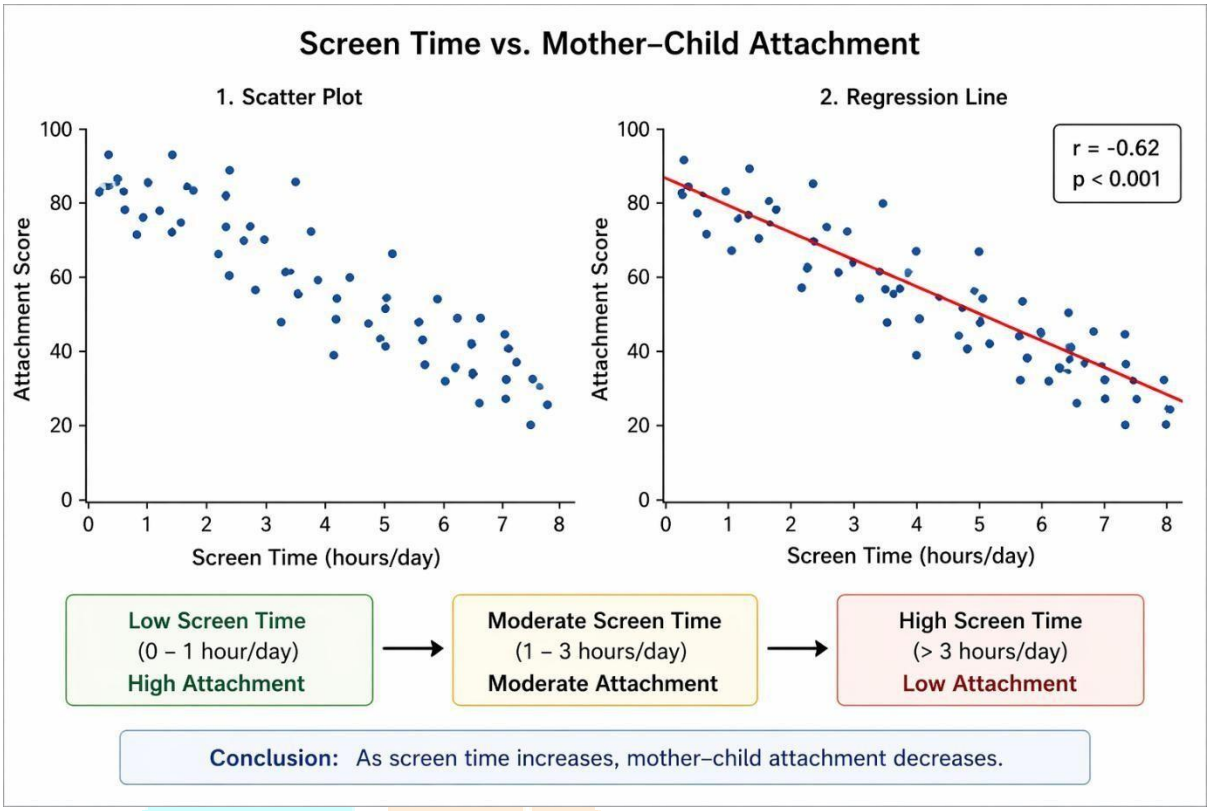
Graphical Interpretation

The graphical results (scatter plot and regression line) show:

A downward trend between screen time and attachment

Children with low screen time → high attachment
Children with high screen time → low attachment

These visuals clearly support the statistical findings of a negative relationship.



Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of interview responses provided deeper insights into how screen time influences family relationships. Several key themes emerged consistently across participants:

• **Reduced Communication:**
Children with higher screen time engaged less in conversations with their mothers, limiting opportunities for meaningful interaction and emotional exchange.

• **Emotional Distancing:**
Increased reliance on digital devices was associated with reduced emotional closeness, with mothers reporting a noticeable decline in bonding and shared experiences.

• **Behavioral Changes:**
Many children exhibited increased irritability, shorter attention spans, and difficulties in emotional regulation, particularly when screen time was high.

• **Increased Screen Dependency:**
A strong preference for digital devices over family activities was observed, often replacing playtime, discussions, and other bonding opportunities.

• **Variation in Parental Monitoring:**
Differences in parental control and supervision of screen use influenced the extent of its impact, with stricter monitoring associated with better interaction patterns.

Overall, the qualitative findings strongly support the quantitative results, illustrating that excessive screen time not only affects behavior but also significantly influences emotional relationships within families.

Summary of Results:

The combined findings indicate that most children engage in moderate to high levels of screen use, while a considerable proportion experience only moderate or weak attachment. A clear and significant negative relationship exists between screen time and mother–child attachment, with screen time emerging as a strong predictor of emotional bonding. Qualitative insights further reveal that increased screen use reduces communication, weakens emotional closeness, and alters family interaction patterns. These results collectively highlight the impact of digital media on the quality of parent–child relationships in contemporary urban settings

5. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the impact of digital media use on mother–child attachment among school-aged children in
Bengaluru. The findings provide important insights into how increasing screen exposure influences emotional bonding and family interactions in contemporary urban settings.

The results indicate that children spend an average of nearly three hours per day on digital devices, with a majority falling within moderate to high usage categories. This reflects the growing integration of digital media into children's daily lives. While technology offers certain benefits, such levels of exposure may reduce opportunities for direct parent–child interaction, which is essential for developing strong emotional connections.

In terms of attachment, although a notable proportion of children demonstrated secure attachment, more than half were categorized as having moderate or insecure attachment. This suggests that a significant number of children may not experience optimal emotional closeness with their caregivers. Such findings raise concerns about the factors influencing attachment, particularly within the context of increasing digital engagement.

A key finding of the study is the significant negative relationship between screen time and mother–child attachment. The correlation results indicate that higher screen time is associated with lower levels of emotional bonding. Furthermore, techno Ference emerged as an even stronger factor, highlighting that interruptions caused by digital devices during interactions may be more detrimental than screen time alone. This emphasizes that not only the duration but also the context of technology use plays a critical role in shaping parent–child relationships.

The regression analysis further strengthens these findings by demonstrating that screen time significantly predicts attachment levels. The results suggest that increases in screen exposure lead to measurable declines in attachment scores, confirming that digital media use has a direct impact on emotional bonding. This highlights the importance of managing screen time effectively to support healthy relational development.

The qualitative findings provide deeper insight into these patterns. Mothers reported reduced communication, emotional distancing, behavioural changes, and increased dependence on digital devices among children with higher screen use. These experiences illustrate how screens can gradually replace meaningful family interactions, thereby weakening emotional connections. The consistency between quantitative and qualitative findings reinforces the reliability of the results.
Overall, the study concludes that excessive screen time negatively affects mother–child attachment by reducing communication, limiting emotional closeness, and increasing reliance on digital devices. Technoference further compounds this issue by disrupting the quality of interactions.
The findings have important practical implications. Parents need to be more mindful of regulating screen time and prioritizing face-to-face interaction with their children. Schools can play a role in promoting awareness about balanced digital habits, while society as a whole can encourage practices that strengthen family bonding and digital well-being.

However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study was confined to an urban sample in Bengaluru, which may limit generalizability. The relatively small sample size and reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Additionally, the focus on mother–child attachment excludes the role of other caregivers, and the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations. Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between screen time and emotional bonding, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to digital media use in order to support healthy parent–child relationships.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the growing influence of digital media on family relationships, particularly the emotional bond between mothers and their children. The findings clearly demonstrate that higher levels of screen time are associated with weaker mother–child attachment, reduced emotional responsiveness, and limited quality interaction. In addition, the concept of technoference further emphasizes how digital interruptions during parent–child interactions can significantly disrupt emotional connection and bonding.

At the same time, the study suggests that digital media is not inherently harmful; rather, its impact depends on how it is used within the family context. Moderate and well-regulated screen use, especially when combined with parental involvement, may not negatively affect relationships. However, excessive and unmonitored use can replace meaningful interactions and reduce opportunities for emotional engagement, which are essential for secure attachment.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between digital engagement and real-life interpersonal connections. Strengthening parent–child communication, encouraging shared family activities, and minimizing digital distractions can play a crucial role in promoting healthy emotional development. These findings are particularly relevant in today's increasingly digital world, where conscious efforts are needed to preserve the quality of human relationships

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was conducted only in Bengaluru, limiting generalizability to other regions, especially rural areas.
- The sample size (N = 120) is relatively small and may not fully represent the larger population.
- Data were based on self-reports from participants, which may be affected by response bias or inaccuracies.
- The study focused only on mother–child attachment, excluding the role of fathers and other caregivers.
- The cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships.
- Variations in socio-economic and cultural factors were not explored in depth.
- The study did not differentiate extensively between types of digital content (educational vs. entertainment).

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine long-term effects of screen time on attachment and development.
- Include larger and more diverse samples across different regions and socio-cultural backgrounds.
- Explore the role of fathers and other caregivers in parent–child attachment.
- Examine the combined impact of parental screen use (technoference) and children's screen habits.
- Investigate the effects of different types of digital content on emotional and social development.
- Study intervention strategies such as parental guidance programs and digital well-being initiatives.
- Incorporate objective measures of screen time (e.g., device tracking) to improve data accuracy.
- Compare urban and rural populations to understand contextual differences in screen use and attachment.

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