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The Effect of Digitalization on Primary Socialization in the Family Institution

Abstract

Socialization is a dynamic process through which individuals learn social norms and values and adapt to society. The most critical stage of this process, primary socialization, usually takes place within the family; at this stage, fundamental norms and behavioral patterns are acquired. However, with the rapid advancement of digitalization, this process is no longer limited to the family, as digital platforms also play an influential role in the construction of children's social identities. The Internet, social media, digital games, and digital content play an important role in shaping children's value judgments and behaviors. This study examines the impact of digitalization on the primary socialization process from a sociological perspective. Designed as a phenomenological inquiry, it is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with eight women and eight men living in Mardin, using a qualitative research method. The data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, and it was found that digitalization has significant effects on intra-family value transmission, parent–child interaction, levels of empathy, and parental attitudes. The findings indicate that digitalization transforms socialization processes in both positive and negative ways. In particular, the study identifies the need to maintain a balance in content control and the continuity of digital use.

Keywords: Family, Digitalization, Child, Interaction, Socialization

Dijitalleşmenin Aile Kurumunda Birincil Toplumsallaşmaya Etkisi

Öz

Toplumsallaşma, bireyin toplumsal norm ve değerleri öğrenerek toplumla uyum sağladığı dinamik bir süreçtir. Bu sürecin en kritik evresi olan birincil toplumsallaşma genellikle aile içinde gerçekleşir; bu aşamada temel normlar ve davranış kalıpları kazanılır. Ancak dijitalleşmenin hız kazanmasıyla süreç yalnızca aileyle sınırlı kalmamakta, dijital mecralar da çocukların toplumsal kimlik inşasında etkili olmaktadır. İnternet, sosyal medya, dijital oyunlar ve dijital içerikler, çocukların değer yargıları ve davranışlarını şekillendirmede önemli bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu araştırma, dijitalleşmenin birincil toplumsallaşma sürecine etkisini sosyolojik açıdan incelemektedir. Nitel araştırma yöntemiyle, Mardin'de yaşayan sekiz kadın ve sekiz erkekle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayalı fenomenolojik bir inceleme olarak tasarlanmıştır. Veriler betimsel analiz yoluyla değerlendirilmiş; dijitalleşmenin aile içi değer aktarımı, ebeveyn-çocuk etkileşimi, empati düzeyi ve ebeveyn tutumları üzerinde belirgin etkiler yarattığı saptanmıştır. Bulgular, dijitalleşmenin toplumsallaşma süreçlerini hem olumlu hem de olumsuz yönde dönüştürdüğünü göstermektedir. Özellikle dijital mecralarda içerik denetimi ve dijital kullanım sürekliliğinde denge sağlanması gerektiği ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile, Dijitalleşme, Çocuk, Etkileşim, Toplumsallaşma

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1. Introduction

Socialization is a multifaceted process through which individuals become part of society by internalizing its values, norms, and behavioral patterns (Tezcan, 2012, p. 55). The first step in this process, primary socialization, particularly takes shape during early childhood through interactions with family members (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). The family serves as an individual's first social environment and directly influences their way of interpreting the world (Giddens, 2012, p. 205). However, in the 21st century, digitalization has fundamentally transformed family structures and intra-family interaction patterns. Digitalization refers to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) into daily life practices, affecting various spheres such as social relationships, consumption habits, educational processes, and family communication (Castells, 2008). Especially with the widespread use of the internet, social media, digital games, and mobile devices, the forms of interaction among family members have changed, leading to the emergence of new dynamics in the process of primary socialization (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). It may be argued that a similar transformation is occurring in Turkey. Digital technologies are influencing children's social development, emotional communication, and processes of value transmission.

Human societies are shaped by continuous social change and transformation. These transformations bring forth new processes, and the current era represents a transitional phase toward the future. In particular, technological advancements have accelerated this transformation (Basalla, 2021; Çalgan, 2023, p. 54). These developments have defined the direction of digitalization, which affects all social structures, from individuals to institutions. In this context, the influence of globalization can be clearly observed (Bostancı, 2020, p. 11). While globalization reduces the importance of physical distance, digitalization further reinforces this trend. The digital process has become a core component of social life and interpersonal relations, bringing with it a paradigm shift. This shift reshapes individuals' thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and behaviors (Han, 2024, p. 9). Digitalization is advancing through global network systems formed by internet-connected devices (Edwards, 2020), with the internet being the primary driving force of digital transformation.

Humanity has evolved from hunter-gatherer societies to the age of information and smart technologies. Social change, accelerated by scientific progress, has led to the emergence of the concepts of digital society and digital humans. In such a social structure, internet-based communication has become the most influential determinant of social interactions (Gencer & Aktan, 2021, p. 1147; Özbek et al., 2022, p. 100). Accordingly, examining the impact of digitalization on the institution of the family particularly within the context of primary socialization holds both theoretical and practical significance. The values acquired during early childhood form the foundation of an individual's lifelong social identity. Aspects such as the influence of digital media on children's role models, the quality of time parents spend with their children, digital monitoring within the family, and parental guidance all reflect the multidimensional nature of this transformation (Chaudron et al., 2015).

Primary socialization is the process through which individuals acquire the fundamental norms, values, language, and behavior patterns of society. This process typically occurs through the family, close environment, and early social interactions. Primary socialization plays a decisive role in the development of an individual's personality and the formation of their social identity (Çıvgın & Yardımcı, 2007, pp. 17–18; Tezcan, 2012, p. 56). Digital

technologies, by creating profound transformations in modes of communication, knowledge production, sharing, and interaction, have redefined the organization of social life. Digital tools such as the internet, social media, and mobile technologies deeply influence how individuals access information and engage socially. These technologies have the potential to enhance individuals' awareness of social norms and values. For instance, children may gain knowledge about different cultures and lifestyles through social media and other digital platforms. The interaction opportunities offered by digital networks enable communication with people from various geographies, thereby expanding children's social perspectives. However, this situation can also exert transformative pressure on local cultural values.

While digital environments may facilitate intra-family communication, they also create conditions for more intensive interactions with external social environments. This has a substantial impact on how individuals construct their social identities. Digital culture, in particular, can shape how young individuals perceive social norms and adapt to them. Interactions in virtual environments may even influence behaviors in physical social contexts. Through digital platforms, individuals find opportunities for self-expression; these modes of expression can affect identity formation and, at times, foster alternative viewpoints in opposition to established societal norms. Digital technologies not only support primary socialization processes but also broaden and diversify their scope. This interaction plays a transformative role in the dynamic structure of society and in the reformation of individuals' social identities.

In this context, the primary aim of this study is to examine the effects of digitalization on the family institution within the framework of the primary socialization process, with a particular focus on parental perceptions. In contemporary societies, where the process of digitalization accelerates day by day, understanding how this transformation reflects particularly on children's socialization processes has emerged as a significant area of research. In this context, the study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effects of digitalization on family roles, communication patterns, and parent–child relationships, based on shared experiences. The research was conducted using a qualitative method and provides data intended to understand the changes and transformations caused by digitalization within the primary socialization process. Within this framework, the evaluations of interviewed parents regarding the effects of digitalization on their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development are included. It is believed that the study will make meaningful contributions to the literature through the findings it presents

2. Literature

As the impact of digitalization has grown, so too has the volume of related research. Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of digitalization on socialization. Recently, emerging concepts such as the Metaverse, Web 3.0, virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, and NFTs although still lacking fully defined conceptual frameworks have become central themes in discussions of three-dimensional digital socialization. Türk and Darı (2022) argue that the Metaverse offers individuals experiences that parallel, yet surpass, real-world socialization in terms of speed and diversity. Their study suggests that users construct their identities and social status in the Metaverse through avatars and NFTs. Kara (2025) emphasizes that digitalization represents not merely a technological transformation but also a profound sociological restructuring. He asserts that digital culture

leads to homogenization within society and that traditional sociological approaches fall short in explaining this phenomenon, necessitating a reinterpretation of social structures. Accordingly, he calls for the reevaluation of key elements such as identity, culture, and religion in the digital age.

The impact of digitalization on childhood culture has also drawn increasing academic interest. Biricik (2022) argues that children in the digital age are raised in media-rich environments and are transitioning from traditional to digital childhood cultures. In a study centered on children's television programs such as Rafadan Tayfa and Dijital Tayfa, it is suggested that while digital screens play a central role in children's daily lives, a longing for traditional values is still evident. İltuş (2021) notes that innovations in digital communication technologies have both positive and negative implications for individuals, society, culture, and education. He highlights that being present in virtual environments has become a new form of socialization albeit one that brings significant challenges.

Kravchenko (2020) states that digitalization has radically altered youth socialization, with young individuals moving away from traditional social bonds and instead relying on digital references such as "googling." Beck's (2016) concepts of "radical individualization" and "digital metamorphosis" are frequently used to explain this shift. Balea Fernández (2021) suggests that socialization is now primarily understood through its virtual forms rather than primary or secondary processes. Her PRISMA-method-based study demonstrates how virtualization has permanently altered educational systems. Kryshtanovskaya, Chernavin, and Lavrov (2022) define the digital generation as "Homo Digitalis" and examine how digital technologies shape individual development and socialization. Although these technologies may distance individuals from traditional subjectivities, they also give rise to more autonomous and creative personalities.

Pertsev et al. (2023) argue that digital socialization has become the dominant form of socialization for today's students, and that educational systems must adapt accordingly. They stress the need to address challenges such as digital inequality, gamification, and information overload with new strategies. Lahikainen (2017) analyzes how digital media affects family interaction and child socialization. He suggests that natural face-to-face interactions within families are being increasingly shaped by digital media, which significantly influences children's social development. Another study focusing on emerging subjectivities in digital education highlights the role of the "prosumer" (producer-consumer) subject in shaping communication strategies and promoting social activism among youth.

Unlike existing studies that primarily focus on the broader impacts of digitalization on socialization, this study aims to examine how the family institution as the primary site of early socialization is being transformed by digitalization. While much of the literature addresses general socialization processes, the current research specifically investigates how children's earliest experiences of socialization within the family are affected by digital media. By employing a qualitative research method, this study contributes to the literature by offering insight into the transformations and disruptions brought about by digitalization in primary socialization. Parental perspectives on the impact of digitalization on children were gathered as part of the research.

3. Method

3.1. Importance, Aim, and Limitations of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its systematic examination of how digitalization affects primary socialization and its contribution to the sociological understanding of these effects. Additionally, this research aims to raise awareness of the challenges in intra-family communication and the potential risks to children's social development, thereby informing family policies and educational programs. The main objective of this study is to examine the effects of digitalization on primary socialization processes within the family from a sociological perspective. Specifically, it aims to explore how the proliferation of information and communication technologies influences components of primary socialization, such as value acquisition, norm internalization, role learning, and identity formation in children.

In this context, the study aims to assess:
The nature of family members' relationships with digital tools,
The impact of digital media use on parent-child interaction,
Transformations in intra-family communication,
The effects of digitalization on children's role-learning processes,
Changes in parental guidance and monitoring roles in the face of digital technologies.

Furthermore, by analyzing how digitalization undermines or transforms primary socialization mechanisms, the study aims to contribute to the literature and offer policy recommendations. It aims to conceptually examine the relationship between digitalization and socialization at a theoretical level and to observe structural changes within families at a practical level to understand broader societal dynamics.

The research was conducted within the borders of Mardin province, Turkey. The study population consists of families with children aged 3–10 who are either in preschool or early primary school. Families with children outside this age group, single-parent households, and childless married couples were excluded from the study. Due to the sociocultural structure of Mardin its socioeconomic conditions, cultural codes, and traditional lifestyle it was challenging to reach participants. Limitations in time and access to social networks also restricted the sample size, which may have affected the representativeness of the results.

Privacy concerns, hesitations about discussing digital media usage, and time constraints during data collection may have led to some incomplete or superficial data. These factors, in particular, limited the depth of the qualitative data. The study was conducted within a defined time frame (July 17–29, 2025). Given the rapidly evolving nature of digitalization, the results may not reflect long-term trends.

3.2. Study Group and Interview Details

The study group consists of 16 participants in total 8 women and 8 men. Because the study's findings were deemed saturation, 16 participants were deemed sufficient. Furthermore, a balanced number of men and women was taken into account. The code W was used for women and M was used for men among the participants in the study. Their ages range from 27 to 48, with an average age of 35.9. In terms of educational background, 3 participants hold associate degrees, 11 hold bachelor's degrees, and 2 hold postgraduate degrees. Participants have between 1 and 3 children. The average amount of time their children spend

in digital environments was identified as 2.6 hours per day. Detailed participant information is provided in Table 1.

Tablo 1: Information about Participants

Participant Code	Age	Education Level	Marital Status	Number of Children	Child's Age	Child's Daily Time in Digital Environments (hours)
W1	27	Associate Degree	Married	1	3	2
W2	37	Postgraduate	Married	3	10	2
W3	27	Bachelor degree	Married	1	4	3
W4	27	Associate Degree	Married	3	5	2
W5	43	Postgraduate	Married	1	8	1
W6	38	Bachelor degree	Married	2	6	3
W7	36	Bachelor degree	Married	2	5	3
W8	30	Bachelor degree	Married	1	3	3
M1	38	Associate Degree	Married	2	4	2
M2	37	Bachelor degree	Married	3	3	3
M3	42	Bachelor degree	Married	3	3	3
M4	46	Bachelor degree	Married	3	5	3
M5	38	Bachelor degree	Married	1	8	2
M6	35	Bachelor degree	Married	1	4	3
M7	37	Bachelor degree	Married	3	5	4
M8	37	Bachelor degree	Married	1	3	3

Field interviews were conducted between July 17 and July 29, 2025. Interviews took place in different settings: 5 participants were interviewed in their homes, 5 in their workplaces, and 6 online. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, a phenomenological design, which is among the qualitative research methods commonly employed in the social sciences, was adopted. This approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of individuals' experiences from their subjective perspectives. (Creswell, 2021, p. 79-80). What differentiates phenomenology from other research approaches is the assumption that there exists an underlying essence of shared experiences (Tekindal & Arsu, 2020, p. 159). Phenomenological analysis concentrates on how individuals interpret their lived experiences of the world and the ways in which they react to them (Layder, 2014, p. 124). Qualitative research is typically employed to gain in-depth understanding of a topic, phenomenon, or event. It consists of a series of interpretive practices that aim to make the world visible and comprehensible (Creswell, 2021, p. 44). This approach is characterized by its flexibility and holistic nature, making it well-suited for exploring human behaviors and actions (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2016, p. 37).

A variety of data collection techniques exist within the qualitative research paradigm, each serving as tools for gathering information about the subject under investigation. Accordingly, this study used both a literature review and interviews for field data collection. The interview method is one of the primary data collection tools in qualitative research. It provides one of the most effective means of understanding individuals' perceptions, meanings, definitions, and constructions of reality (Punch, 2011, pp. 165–166). Though it may initially appear straightforward, conducting an interview requires a combination of skill, sensitivity, focus, interpersonal understanding, foresight, mental alertness, and discipline (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2016, p. 129). Various types of interviews exist, such as structured, unstructured, semi-

structured, and focus group interviews. This study employed semi-structured interviews, a method that does not dictate the full content of the interview but instead allows for flexible planning around a guiding framework (Punch, 2011, p. 167).In order to document the ethical approval of the semi-structured interview form used as a data collection tool in the study, an ethics report was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Board of Mardin Artuklu University on 17 July 2025, with the decision numbered E-79906804-050.04-204841.

In qualitative research, interviews are generally less rigid, enabling participants to express their views freely and in their own words (Merriam, 2018, p. 89). The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis, a form of qualitative data interpretation that involves summarizing and interpreting information collected through various techniques. The main objective of this analysis is to present findings in an interpreted form that is accessible to readers.(Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2016, pp. 239–240). In descriptive research, data are presented thoroughly and attentively, enabling a clear portrayal of the current situation (Bal, 2001, p. 67).

Based on the findings, the study's evaluation will be conducted. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information without the intention of testing a hypothesis, but rather to obtain qualitative data on the field of study. The research population consisted of married individuals living in Mardin who had children aged 3–10, corresponding to the primary socialization stage. The study aimed to analyze how digitalization affects family structures and children's socialization within this age group. The sample was selected using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques.This sample was chosen to reach families directly involved in digital processes. Snowball sampling was also used to reach other families whose children had similar experiences. Particularly, families whose children regularly interact with digital media, the internet and mobile technologies were selected.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

In order to reduce common criticisms regarding validity and reliability in qualitative research, several precautions were taken. This study has paid particular attention to these issues. The findings were derived from data collected through interviews with a study group of 16 participants. The volume of data collected is considered to enhance the reliability of the research. Details concerning the selection and characteristics of the study group, as well as data collection and analysis procedures, are explained comprehensively in the Method section. To prevent data loss, all interviews were audio-recorded. For the purpose of external reliability, audio recordings, interview transcripts, and coding outputs were digitally archived. In addition, to ensure internal reliability, direct quotations reflecting thematic content were included, and a descriptive approach was adopted. Participants' statements were presented verbatim, thereby enabling readers to interpret the findings from their own perspectives. Using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software in research reduces the margin of error compared to manual coding, which in turn enhances the validity and reliability of the research results (Creswell, 2021, pp. 252–255).

4. Findings

Under this heading, findings obtained from the field were analyzed descriptively by forming themes. The first theme addresses the negative effects of digitalization and is titled "Negative Impact and Intrafamilial Distance." Under this heading, participants' negative attitudes towards this area are presented. The second theme highlights the positive aspects of digitalization and is labeled "Positive Reflections of Digitalization." Here, expressions showing relatively positive attitudes are included. Lastly, the third theme is titled "Impact Varying According to Content Type." Under this heading, findings reflecting more cautious responses

were evaluated. The themes and concepts presented in the findings section are illustrated in Figure 1.
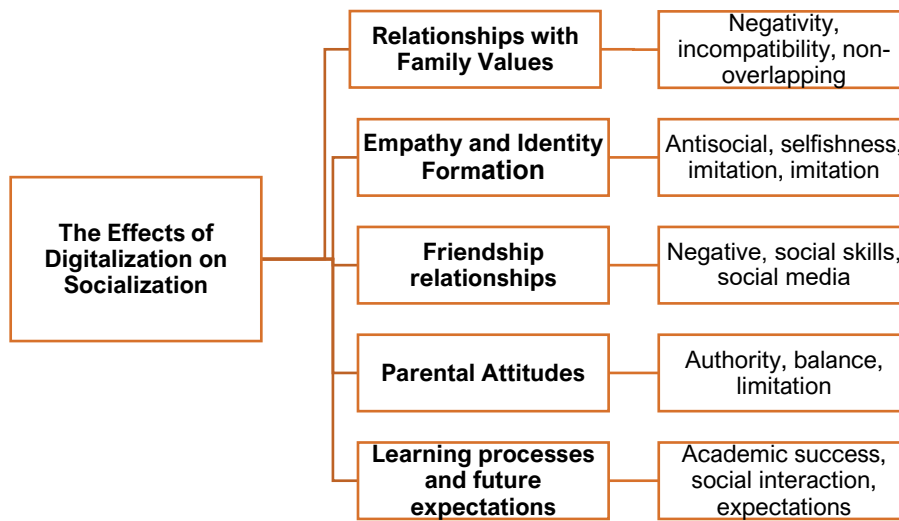
Figure 1: The Impact of Digitalization on the Family Institution

4.1. Family Interaction and Its Relation to Family Values

One of the most crucial stages of socialization is intra-family interaction. Through this interaction, the child begins to acquire the social skills necessary for adapting to communal life. Indeed, individuals are first introduced to societal norms and values within the family environment and begin to internalize them there. In traditional family structures, the mother, father, and siblings are the primary agents of this process. However, this dynamic has undergone a significant transformation under the influence of digital media content. When examining the effects of digital media on family structure, communication styles, and relational dynamics, a large proportion of participants reported that such content reduces intra-family interaction, weakens interpersonal communication, and leads to negative consequences for children's developmental processes. Regarding this issue, several statements were made;

> "In my view, one of the most significant negative impacts of digital media on family dynamics is its detrimental influence on children's development and learning" (W3).

> "The excessive use of digital media within the family setting weakens emotional ties between family members and erodes core values such as love, respect, empathy, and mutual support. This represents, in my view, the most critical adverse effect of digitalization." (M4)

> "Children who become detached from real-life experiences often exhibit aggressive behavior when screen time ends, making it increasingly difficult to engage in meaningful communication with them." (M6)

Products that make a statement similar to this idea M7;

> "Intra-family interactions generally occur when there are shared opinions and preferences among family members or when there is a desire to introduce differing perspectives. In the absence of these conditions, interaction tends to decline, which may negatively affect

> the atmosphere of conversation within the family and the tendency to spend time together."

> "Excessive exposure to digital media content leads to attention deficits in children and weakens their ability to concentrate; this situation can negatively affect both their academic achievement and their ability to perform tasks in daily life."(W6).

However, some argue that this may vary depending on the content.

> "Watching cartoons on supervised and educational channels like TRT Çocuk has positive effects on children. However, uncontrolled viewing of cartoons on devices such as phones or tablets can lead to aggressive behaviors in children." (W5).

Based on the obtained findings, participants indicate that family interactions are negatively affected during the process of digitalization. Only a very small number of participants considered its effects to be positive in this regard.

Within the socialization process, individuals primarily learn right and wrong behaviors in the family environment. Through this, children internalize behaving in accordance with social norms, facilitating easier adaptation to social life. However, this traditional process is changing due to the influence of digitalization. A considerable amount of information, attitudes, and behavioral patterns are now acquired directly through digital media; this weakens the intra-family social transmission. The extent to which digital media content aligns with family values is currently a significant topic of debate. The majority of the study participants stated that these contents do not conform to family values. In connection with this issue;

> "As far as we have observed, it does not align well with our societal values; there are very few channels we are convinced conform to these values" (M6).

> "Family values do not quite align with the age group and the content they watch or follow. I do not believe that family values and sensitivity towards one's environment can be acquired through digital platforms, because I think values are learned by living and observing in real life, not digitally" (M8).

W5, who considers the digital realm to be different from TV:

> "There is about a 60% overlap on TV, whereas on phones it can be said to be around 20%."

The reason for this perception stems from the fact that content viewed on local channels aligns more closely with family values. Since the digital realm offers content on a more global scale, it includes many materials that do not correspond with family values. Indeed, participants supporting this viewpoint stated:

> "I am of the opinion that what they encounter in the digital realm does not align with family values" (M5).

> "I do not believe that the content conforms to local norms" (M4).

Participants generally express that the content they encounter on digital platforms often does not align with family and societal values. It is believed that television content, especially from local channels, is more consistent with these values. Due to the presence of global content in digital environments, the proportion of content suitable to local norms and family structures is reported to be low. Some participants argue that values are learned through real-life

experiences rather than digital media. Overall, the views suggest that digital content may pose a threat to social and moral values.

4.2. Empathy and Identity Formation

In the process of socialization, empathy enables individuals to build healthy relationships within society by understanding the emotions and thoughts of others. Through this mechanism, social norms and values are internalized, communication skills are enhanced, the sense of belonging is reinforced, and tolerance towards differences increases. Empathy contributes to individuals' responsible fulfillment of social roles, forming the foundation for both individual and societal harmony and moral development.

In the context of digitalization, participants were asked questions to understand how this process unfolds. Regarding this topic:

> "Because everything is virtual, empathy does not develop; empathy occurs in real life. The fact that interactions largely take place in digital environments weakens emotional bonds between individuals, thereby negatively affecting the development of empathy. Since face-to-face interaction is more effective, empathy develops more healthily especially in real life" (M3).

Many participants stated that digital environments adversely affect the development of empathy. Although a few participants expressed positive views, they were in the minority. For instance, participant M5 emphasized the content aspect:

> "I think beneficial cartoons and movies have a positive effect on empathy."

Although the negative effects of digitalization on the development of empathy are emphasized, the focus often lies on the influence of this process on children's personality traits:

> "Since children are excluded from street life, they tend to become introverted and antisocial. Their lack of access to physical play areas, peer relationships, and outdoor activities negatively affects their development of social skills, causing them to become more withdrawn and avoidant of social interaction" (W5).

Another participant (W6) particularly evaluated the situation in terms of the time spent in digital environments:

> "But as screen time increases, the development of empathy weakens and selfishness increases. The rising duration spent on mobile devices can negatively affect children's empathy skills and reduce their ability to recognize others' emotions and needs."

This statement also alludes to personality formation, which will be discussed in more detail later. It is emphasized that selfish individuals become more prominent through their relationship with the digital realm. In parallel, participant W8 points out that children tend to develop "aggressive and irritable" personalities due to the time they spend in this space. Similar responses were received from other participants:

> "It varies depending on the content they watch, but the most dangerous aspect of social media is the rapid emotional shifts. Impatient children cannot remain in a positive emotional state for long, making it difficult for them to establish empathy" (M7).

> "They start to identify with cartoon characters and try to imitate them. If the character plays a combative role, the child assumes that conflicts can also be solved through fighting" (M8).

Empathy enables individuals to establish healthy social relationships, internalize social norms, improve communication skills, and foster tolerance. However, digitalization may disrupt this process. Most participants indicated that digital environments negatively affect the development of empathy.

Socialization and identity formation are two inseparable processes. Socialization is the primary mechanism that shapes an individual's identity, whereas identity is the personal outcome of the socialization process. Every individual continuously constructs, reproduces, and transforms their identity through interaction with the social environments they are part of. This dynamic has started to function differently in the digital age. Digital platforms offer children opportunities to share their interests, develop a sense of belonging, and explore various identities. On platforms such as social media, blogs, and video-sharing sites, children express themselves through visual, written, and interactive means. In this process, they critically evaluate the identity models presented in online environments, shape their self-perception more consciously, and can construct authentic identities without being consumed by the pursuit of social approval. Thus, the digital space serves both as a tool for expression and as a domain for identity development. In this context, the study posed related questions.

> "Children raised in family environments that promote conscious and limited use of digital media develop healthier self-expression skills" (M2).

Excessive exposure to digital content negatively affects the formation of personality. Such high exposure makes the situation even more complex. Participant M3 touches upon this issue, stating:

> "It's complex because it becomes hard to decide what you are or who you are."

The impact of digitalization on personality development is also emphasized by W2:

> "It leads to the formation of introverted and insecure personalities."

As a result, children face difficulties in expressing themselves. Regarding this, W5 commented: "When exposed to phones too much, I think they cannot express themselves well."

> Similarly, W6 expressed:

> "Children cannot express themselves; they waste time constantly on social media."

This phenomenon is not limited to these effects alone. Especially, the modeling of characters encountered in digital content directly influences personality development. In this regard:

> "A fictional hero or character encountered on digital platforms can have a highly negative impact on a child's identity development. Hero figures or character representations frequently encountered in digital media significantly affect how children choose their role models; particularly, content involving value conflicts poses serious risks for identity development" (M5).

> "After a while, the child begins to identify with the character they admire rather than their own identity; they no longer want to be called by their real name, such as Ali, but rather by the name of the character. They drift away from their own identity" (M6).

> "A child's self-development and observations on becoming an individual are completely aligned with the content they consume. If the content is positive, they imitate it; if negative, they imitate that as well. This, in turn, affects their development" (M7).

In addition to these effects, participants also observed that children display behaviors such as irritability and impatience, which are often associated with unhappiness. In this regard:

> "Children want to have everything they see, which eventually leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness."(M4).

> "It negatively affects them. They become more aggressive, fearful, and tend to imitate bad behaviors they witness." (W5.

> "They become more aggressive, extremely impatient, and unsatisfied they even want their favorite things to end quickly so they can move on to the next one."(W7).

Moreover, online games have been found to influence personality and even impact lives. One study examined the "Blue Whale" game, revealing that participants were compelled by game administrators to complete certain tasks under threat for instance, that a family member would be harmed if they refused. It was found that after being assigned to kill a family member, some participants were pushed toward suicide upon refusal. The study concluded that some individuals lost their lives due to digital games, and emphasized the importance of educating families about their children's internet usage (Çetin, 2022). Digital games can also lead to addiction and significantly affect individuals' lives. Although today's technology offers many conveniences, it also brings negative consequences such as digital game addiction. This habit, often acquired during childhood, tends to persist into later years. With the advancement of technology, digital games have become more realistic, which increases the risk of addiction. One study examined the impact of the widely popular PUBG game on digital game addiction and found that addiction has increased (Baldemir & Övür, 2021). In our study, a participant provided a similar example:

> "A child's character is mostly shaped by the content they watch. If the content includes car racing, the child mimics that with toy cars; if it includes a crash, they pretend to crash somewhere as well. Based on this example, it's clear that behavior is heavily influenced. This applies not only to children but also to adults" (M8).

4.3. Parental Attitudes

In the process of socialization, parental attitudes play a fundamental role in enabling children to establish healthy relationships with their social environment. In today's context where digital media use is increasingly widespread, the way families guide and supervise their children's interactions with digital platforms directly influences how children internalize societal norms and values. Particularly, parents' reactions to digital applications and platforms assume a critical role in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors toward these environments. Regarding this matter, participant M2 stated:

> "Children should be kept away from social media platforms."

This statement reflects concerns about the potential risks digital environments pose to children's psychosocial development. It aligns with opinions suggesting that unregulated content encountered on social media can negatively impact children's value judgments and self-perception. Participant M3 emphasized:

> "When there is no parental supervision in digital environments, I can say that the child tends to be drawn to aggressive or harmful content."

This comment reveals worries that unsupervised time in digital media may lead to aggression, fear, or behavioral disorders in children. It also highlights the lack of external control when children are not guided in choosing media content.

> "Instead of completely banning digital media use, it should be guided through educational content" (W1).

This approach aligns with perspectives that advocate for the pedagogical use of digital tools and suggest that structured media experiences can support cognitive development. It also indicates a parental attitude rooted in digital media literacy.

> "I believe that digital media usage limits should be set in mutual understanding with the child" (W2).

Such a perspective reflects a democratic parenting style, rather than an authoritarian one, encouraging voluntary rule adherence, strengthening family communication, and supporting a healthy socialization process.

> "Children develop intense curiosity and interest in digital platforms. This indicates their inclination toward these environments, while also revealing the parents' responsibility to guide and balance this interest" (W3).

A female participant coded W4 emphasized that "as long as digital content is presented within time limits and with content selection," it does not create negative effects. This highlights the critical role of time and content control in digital media use and suggests that structured screen time can be managed without harming children's development.

> "I believe that strict bans on digital media increase curiosity in children and produce the opposite effect" (M4).

This outcome can be explained by the reactance effect in psychology, which describes increased interest in prohibited items (Topçugil, 2024). Therefore, explanatory and guiding approaches may yield healthier outcomes than coercive ones.

> "When prevented from accessing harmful content, the child exhibits anger and violent tendencies" (W5).

This demonstrates that children's relationship with digital content serves not only entertainment purposes but also fulfills emotional needs. Preventing access may lead to emotional disturbances. Furthermore, some participants noted that parents themselves are heavy digital media users, which creates negative modeling for their children. This observation underscores the necessity for digital awareness and role modeling not only among children but also among parents. Still, some participants emphasized the potential positive effects of controlled and conscious media exposure:

> "I think that presenting digital content in a controlled and conscious way can have positive effects on the child. Because I believe there are useful things in it. So, it can be positive depending on the content the child watches. That's my view" (W8).

This approach emphasizes that structured media use can be integrated with pedagogical gains and suggests that digital tools are not inherently harmful what matters is how they are used. Completely banning such environments may lead to unintended consequences:

> "Strict bans on digital media use result in undesirable outcomes in children. For instance, children start to access digital content secretly and drift away from communication with their parents. I think this leads to real behavioral issues" (M6).

> "As far as I can observe, our child tries to access content secretly when he feels pressure. He even turns on the phone while we're asleep and uses it on mute so we don't wake up. He feels the pressure but doesn't give up the content either. I worry that this may become a serious issue in the future" (M7).

This suggests that behaviors controlled through external pressure rather than self-regulation do not produce lasting and healthy behavioral outcomes. Therefore, digital media limitations should be set through rules mutually agreed upon with the child. Yet, this brings the question of authority into discussion.

> "I set rules to establish authority, but sometimes these rules backfire. For instance, the child shows resistance when trying to use digital media and displays negative emotional reactions when denied access" (M2).

> "I believe that with digitalization, the child starts to question parental authority. It seems to me that the child wants to make his own decisions" (W2).

This reflects the contemporary family structure where authority is not imposed top-down but formed within reciprocal relationships, while also indicating the risk of weakening parental control. To maintain balance, some participants stated that they use boundary-setting methods:

> "As a family, we placed limits on digital media use. This way we maintain authority and also keep the child from being completely detached from the digital space. That's the logical way otherwise, it gets difficult" (W3).

> "I don't completely ban digital content, but I explain the positive and negative aspects of it to the child. This way, I support him and maintain authority, right, professor?" (M5).

> "I try to establish authority while not completely banning access. For instance, I allow beneficial usage" (W7).

> "Although I sometimes resist the child's demands, I act more flexibly when it comes to playing games. However, I do set boundaries for platforms like YouTube" (M6).

These responses reveal that parents generally prefer restrictive and guiding approaches rather than total prohibitions. Instead of enforcing a full ban on digital content, they aim to keep children connected to the digital world while informing them about its pros and cons. In doing so, they foster both digital awareness and maintain parental authority. This approach aligns with contemporary academic concepts such as "digital balance," "active media mediation," and "involved parenting." It is also evident that parents demonstrate flexibility based on their child's individual needs imposing restrictions on some platforms while being more tolerant with others.

4.4. Peer Relationships

Behavioral patterns learned within the family directly influence children's attitudes and communication styles in their peer relationships. Children who establish secure attachments and develop positive communication skills during the primary socialization process tend to engage in healthier and more balanced interactions within their friendships. Conversely, early childhood friendships also contribute significantly to socialization by enhancing skills such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. However, the process of digitalization has altered the dynamics of these relationships particularly through the influence of digital games.

> "In my view, digital games negatively affect children's face-to-face communication skills. Children who spend long hours in front of a screen tend to struggle with direct social interaction" (W2).

> "I would say that digital games cause aggressive behaviors in children, which are then reflected in their social lives. The problem arises because they try to replicate in real life what they experience in the game" (W3).

These games are not limited to such effects; they also impact and weaken children's communication skills. Several participants expressed views in this direction:

> "Digital content, particularly digital games, lead children to move away from physical play environments. As a result, their social relationships weaken" (M4).

> "Digital games increase social isolation and distance children from face-to-face relationships. Therefore, I believe they weaken interpersonal communication" (W4).

> "I believe that experiences gained from digital games significantly hinder children's face-to-face social relationships. I worry that especially online interactions may reduce opportunities for children to develop direct social skills" (m5).

These statements highlight not only the individualizing effect of digital media but also the growing disconnect between children and real-life social bonding, as entertainment replaces interpersonal engagement. Nonetheless, some participants pointed to the potential positive effects of digital environments:

> "I think digital game content has become a tool for sharing and interaction among children. I believe digital content provides not only individual but also social learning opportunities, contributing humor and creativity to peer relationships" (W5).

> "When children watch educational games and then play those games with their families, it has positive effects on communication and bonding. In my opinion, game-based family interaction increases children's self-confidence, reinforces their sense of responsibility and achievement, and shows that properly structured digital content can offer positive social contributions" (M7).

A male parent, coded M6, emphasized the need for balance, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of digital gaming:

> "While I acknowledge that digital games can contribute to individual development, I believe they are limiting in terms of social cooperation and group-based play behavior. Individual digital experiences may not be sufficient for developing social skills, potentially weakening children's real-life teamwork, empathy, and collaboration abilities. That's why proper use is essential."

Socialization is a dynamic process through which individuals integrate into society and adapt to its socio-cultural structure via norms and values. Today, this process occurs not only through face-to-face interaction but also through digital platforms. Social media has become a powerful space for identity construction, developing group belonging, and learning normative behavior patterns. Accordingly, the relationship between socialization and social media use requires renewed sociological evaluation.

> "Social media interactions negatively affect children's social acceptance processes. This is because virtual approval metrics such as likes, follower counts, or visibility on digital platforms can put pressure on children's self-esteem and increase feelings of exclusion" (M1).

> "Social media environments make it harder for children to be included in or accepted by social groups. Children who are not present or active enough on online platforms risk being excluded by their peer groups" (M2).

> "I believe social media platforms weaken face-to-face relationships and contribute to increased social exclusion. Especially the lack of online visibility and interaction may cause a child to feel worthless among their peers" (W4).

> "Children who are heavily engaged with social media gradually become alienated from their surroundings, distance themselves from real social environments, and may even begin to consciously exclude others. I believe this perception formed through social media weakens children's empathy skills" (M6).

> "I think social media interactions pose a risk of modeling negative behaviors such as cyberbullying, threatening, and psychological pressure in children. Moreover, these platforms do not support the development of children's abilities to initiate and sustain social play, which may lead to both exclusion and failure in social communication" (W6).

Virtual validation systems such as likes, follower counts, and visibility on social media are becoming external reference points in how children assess themselves. This represents a serious risk, as it weakens self-esteem and increases the feeling of exclusion. The inability to join online social groups may lead to real-life social exclusion, suggesting that digital social activity shapes the acceptance process in physical settings as well. Diminished face-to-face communication, reduced empathy, and detachment from authentic relationships present serious psychosocial developmental challenges. Additionally, negative dynamics like cyberbullying and psychological pressure hinder the development of social skills and reinforce exclusion.

4.5. Learning Processes and Future Expectations

Socialization and learning are two intertwined and complementary fundamental processes. While socialization provides the social foundation for learning, learning enables individuals to acquire the necessary knowledge to adapt to society. A person can become an active member of society only if these two processes function healthily. Digitalization has transformed both socialization and learning, rendering them more global, rapid, and interactive. However, this transformation has also introduced new risks regarding individuals' social skills, attention spans, and capacities for critical thinking.

> "I believe there is a positive relationship between online learning and children's academic performance as well as their social interaction skills. This indicates that if digital materials are used appropriately, they can support children's development" (M1).

> "Digital educational tools have a positive impact on children's learning processes. Especially interactive content and visually supported presentations can cater to different learning styles and facilitate learning through engagement" (W1).

> "I think digital learning materials support academic performance, boost self-confidence, and may enhance peer communication through virtual interaction channels. This shows that when structured properly, online learning can be beneficial not only academically but also socially" (W5).

However, some participants believe that digitalization may negatively affect the learning process:

> "I think online education does not enhance children's academic success and falls short when compared to traditional methods. The lack of social interaction, instant feedback, and sustained attention in face-to-face education adversely affects learning" (W2).

> "In my opinion, children's attention spans shorten in digital learning environments, and their opportunities for social interaction become limited" (W3).

"Children's attention tends to wander continuously in digital learning settings. Especially when supervision at home is insufficient or when digital materials contain overly stimulating visuals, it becomes difficult for the child to maintain focus" (W6).

"Digital content can inspire children and foster a 'can-do' attitude, which in turn can lead to positive changes in both self-confidence and behavior. From the perspective of observational learning theory and self-efficacy development, this demonstrates that digital materials can shape not only knowledge but also behavioral patterns" (M7).

The effects of digitalization on socialization are not limited to current social structures and relationships; they also shape participants' perceptions and expectations of the future. Considering the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies, participants expressed that this transformation could influence not only their individual lives but also how societal structures function, forms of communication, modes of cultural production, and even the definition of the public sphere. A shared view emerged among participants that the impact of digitalization will continue to grow. In this context, it is believed that digitalization will create deep effects across many domains from education to employment, politics to social relationships and that these effects will significantly shape social norms, values, and identities. Participants shared both positive and negative perspectives on this topic.

"I think children's relationship with the digital world will positively impact their future social and professional lives. Being digitally competent will give them an advantage in interpersonal and professional communication" (M1).

"Being exposed to digital technologies at an early age is beneficial for developing digital skills. It allows children to become more adaptable, tech-savvy, and productive members of society in the future" (W1).

"I believe children growing up in a digital world especially develop problem-solving and creativity skills. This could help them produce innovative solutions using technology, which in turn can benefit their future careers and social lives" (M6).

"Children try out different identities by modeling characters in the digital domain, and I think educational content can help them realize their potential in this process. Therefore, digital environments may provide opportunities for personal growth and talent awareness" (M7).

Alongside these positive perspectives, some participants expressed concerns:

"The fact that everything is readily available in digital environments may lead to both mental and physical laziness in children, which can negatively affect productivity. Digitalization is often passive in nature and may weaken problem-solving, creativity, and innovation skills in future professional life" (M3).

"Superficial relationships formed in digital environments may result in a lack of trust and promote suspicious or introverted personality traits in children. This could cause difficulties in building mutual trust and empathy in their future social relationships" (W2).

"Although social media can yield positive results when used appropriately, I believe uncontrolled use by both children and parents may lead to addiction. This could cause problems such as attention deficit and a loss of belonging, affecting both future planning and social relationships" (W6).

> "I've observed that children tend to imitate the characters and lifestyles they see in the digital world without questioning them, which leads to a lack of critical thinking and superficial admiration" (W7).

Digital technologies have the potential to significantly shape children's future social and professional lives. Early exposure to such technologies helps children become familiar with digital tools and develop interaction and problem-solving skills. These abilities, in turn, can offer significant advantages in both their careers and social lives by fostering innovation and productivity. Furthermore, experimenting with identities based on digital characters and discovering personal potential through educational content provides meaningful opportunities for personal development and talent recognition. However, digitalization also presents challenges. The ease of access to ready-made information may cause mental and physical inertia, thereby weakening children's productivity and critical thinking skills. Superficial interactions in digital spaces can lead to trust issues and social withdrawal. Moreover, uncontrolled social media usage can result in addiction, attention disorders, and a weakened sense of belonging. Imitating digital role models without questioning their values may further inhibit the development of critical thinking.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the impact of digitalization on family structure and primary socialization processes from a contemporary perspective. The findings indicate that digital media and communication environments bring about significant transformations in various dimensions, including personality development, empathy capacity, identity formation, intra-family relationships, and interactions with social values. Digitalization and digital content have substantially altered the ways in which children learn social norms, values, and cultural codes through the family. Through digital platforms, children can interact with individuals from different cultures and encounter diverse role models. However, this situation has the potential to create cultural tension by generating conflicts between locally acquired values within the family and global values encountered in digital environments.

The study reveals that the quality of digital content may exert both supportive and disruptive effects on children's socialization processes and mechanisms of value transmission. Supervised and pedagogically appropriate content enhances children's social skills and supports intra-family communication. In contrast, uncontrolled, excessive, and age-inappropriate exposure tends to weaken family bonds, hinder the development of empathy, and adversely affect the formation of a healthy social identity. In this regard, digitalization represents not only a technological transformation but also a profound sociocultural change that reshapes the relationship between individuals and society. The study emphasizes the necessity of critically addressing this transformation, particularly in terms of children's value systems and family dynamics.

Parental views collected during the field research suggest that the increase in screen time disrupts both parent-child relationships and children's processes of learning social roles and constructing identities. Participants particularly stressed that digital games and social media platforms may undermine children's ability to form friendships, develop empathy, and achieve social adjustment.

Therefore, the effects of digital media on child development should be assessed not only in terms of potential risks but also in relation to the constructive opportunities it offers. When used consciously and under supervision, educational and creative digital content fosters children's self-expression, enhances their self-confidence, and supports the development of problem-solving skills. Conversely, excessive and uncontrolled use is associated with psychosocial issues such as emotional isolation, difficulties in anger management, selfishness, lack of empathy, and problems in self-expression.

One of the key findings of this research is the transformative effect of digitalization on social relationships. Friendships formed through social media and digital games have led children to distance themselves from traditional face-to-face interactions. The study demonstrates that the central role of virtual environments in social life transforms children's processes of social integration, participation in group dynamics, and development of a sense of belonging. In this context, dynamics such as social acceptance, exclusion, and cyberbullying complicate identity development and weaken the sense of social belonging. The future of primary socialization and the family institution will be shaped by raising digitally competent individuals and by parents actively assuming supervisory and guiding roles. While digitalization profoundly transforms traditional patterns of social relationships, it simultaneously presents both new risks and opportunities for individuals and institutions. The findings highlight the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach when families and educators evaluate the positive and negative aspects of digital media use.

In this context, parental authority and guidance play a direct role in shaping children's development. The results indicate that participatory, explanatory, and constructive parenting styles lead to more favorable cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes compared to authoritarian and restrictive approaches. Guidance models based on open communication help children evaluate media content from a critical perspective and position themselves as digitally literate individuals.

Raising awareness about digital media literacy is a fundamental requirement not only for children but also for parents and educators to consciously and critically evaluate digital environments. Assessing media content from pedagogical and ethical perspectives is of critical importance for managing the impacts of digitalization in a healthy manner. As an inevitable process of social transformation, digitalization affects both family structures and individual lives. However, through conscious guidance and digital media literacy, it is possible to create a more balanced environment that supports children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Future research should focus on comparative analyses of how digitalization influences socialization processes among individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical regions. Moreover, it is essential to develop applicable, sustainable, and socially effective strategies and public policies to promote digital media literacy. Such policies will be decisive not only at the individual level but also in fostering social solidarity, ensuring cultural continuity, and supporting the development of multidimensional future generations.

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