

On Digital Media Risks, Intensive Parenting, and Glocal Tensions: Public Discourse and Parents' Experiences in Vietnam

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Amid rapid technosocial change, public anxiety surrounding digital media risks has heightened, subjecting parents to expectations of intensive parenting. Parents from the Global South must grapple with cultural tensions between their children's global media landscape and local everyday practices. This study investigates how the Vietnamese public and parents debate digital media risks, the ideology of intensive parenting in a digital age, and relevant "glocal" tensions. Deploying netnography, the data set comprises 43 news articles, 1,460 public comments, and 6 online interviews. The public and parents agreed on 1 dominant ideology of intensive parenting that involves hypervigilance of the children's media access and consumption. Class plays a crucial role in explaining the variations of parenting practices. While the conservative Vietnamese public and less wealthy parents deemed YouTube a cultural threat to traditional Vietnamese values, middle-class Vietnamese parents championed YouTube's global merits in preparing their children for opportunities beyond their local setting. These findings call for more culturally nuanced theorization of global media platforms' influence on parenting practices in underexamined societies where glocal tensions remain pronounced.

Keywords: digital media risks, intensive parenting, glocalization, YouTube, netnography

As digital media becomes deeply integrated into family life, parents must figure out how to discern media opportunities and risks shaping their children's living and learning experiences. Parental mediation of children's media activities (Nathanson, 2001) does not only exist within the home. It can expand into larger society to influence and be influenced by the public's shared values and beliefs.

Amid rapid technosocial change and our increasingly uncertain global economy, public anxiety surrounding digital media risks for children has become invasive (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, & Macvarish, 2014). Parents may be entangled in a culture of intensive parenting that imposes heightened expectations

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on what it means to be a competent parent for a digital future—one that may dictate that parents sacrifice and go to extreme lengths to raise their children—financially, emotionally, and physically, across offline and online milieus. This tendency to understand digital media as risks rather than as possibilities causes immense pressure and fatigue on parents who, if failing to meet societal standards, may be judged as irresponsible, thereby disempowering the agency of both the parents and the child (Furedi, 2014; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Nelson, 2010; Ungar, 2009).

While struggling to navigate different presumptions and pressures on their parenting practices, parents (especially those from/in the Global South) must grapple with cross-cultural tensions within their children's complicated media environments. Technologies and media content transferred across previously impermeable borders can both morph and reinforce power hierarchies, connecting and fragmenting its audiences. Capitalist media and commodities originating from the West have often targeted children around the world as homogenous subjects driven by a universalized quest for upward (and assumed Western) mobility, while these children lack wholesome indigenous and local media (Parameswaran, 2013). Hence, audiences in the Global South must constantly balance concerns over cultural imperialism from the largely Westernized stream of global media while affirming their own local identities, also understood as "glocal" (Robertson, 1994) tensions. Given that the construction of childhood media experiences is mainly shaped by adults who raise and educate children (Parameswaran, 2013), parents from the Global South bear the additional burden of maneuvering the ever-changing flow of media technologies and different cultural relationships between global modernity and their local everyday life.

The present study investigates how the Vietnamese public and parents discuss digital media risks, the ideology of intensive parenting in a digital age, and relevant glocal tensions. Deploying netnography (Kozinets, 2020) and choosing YouTube as the main site of investigation, the findings offer an empirical account of how the public perceived and expected Vietnamese parents to manage different types of YouTube-related risks for their children, how parents responded to an emergent ideology of intensive parenting, and how they navigated challenges arising from salient cultural tensions.

Vietnam is an appropriate context for this research for two reasons. First, extant research on Vietnam's traditional notions of parenthood from a cultural studies approach—or what makes certain forms of parenting practices idealistically and quintessentially Vietnamese—is well-established. Yet we still do not know whether the largely Western-centric ideology of intensive parenting (Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Lim, 2020; Nelson, 2010; Ungar, 2009) is applicable to Vietnamese parents and children. Heavily influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism, relationships in a traditional Vietnamese family are highly hierarchical. Vietnamese children are considered a source of happiness and fortune and are at the center of domestic activities (Nguyen, 2015). Children must strictly obey their parents' authority, while parents must ensure the best education and developmental environment for their children (Burr, 2006; Mestechkina, Nguyen, & Shin, 2014). As the penetration of the Internet and digital devices into Vietnamese households has intensified, digital media are simultaneously shaping and shaped by local parenting practices. A survey found that up to 78% of Vietnamese children under six years old used tablets and smartphones for an average of 30–60 minutes per day, but their parents were not well-informed about parenting strategies and resorted to family habits (*Tuoi Tre News*, 2014). Pham and Lim (2019) found that the local public education

system and structure of media regulations have not caught up with this media penetration. Clearly, Vietnam as an underresearched context warrants our attention.

Second, there is scant research on how parenting practices in Vietnam are influenced by digital media use and cultural factors. Vietnam has been negotiating its old-world, conservative traditions with post-Communist, cosmopolitan values that have characterized its entry into the global economy for the past three decades (Nilan, 1999; *Tuoi Tre News*, 2014). For instance, the contemporary Vietnamese nuclear family has engaged less with extended family members, used less corporal punishment (such as caning) on children, and accepted more Western values such as individualism (Mestechkina et al., 2014). Yet, these modern values must not compromise the traditional priority of maintaining the hierarchy and peace within the Vietnamese family. Strong families and traditional values are still widely considered prerequisites to a well-run nation and part of a Vietnamese citizen's civic duties (Burr, 2006). The Vietnam market has become YouTube's ninth-biggest global market (Statista, 2023), solidifying the country's relevancy in YouTube-related discussions. YouTube is a fast-growing, glocal media site within Vietnam where YouTube's global outlook and local conditions undergird empirical potential for this study's inspection of glocal tensions.

The next section outlines major concerns and policy developments surrounding YouTube's safety for child viewers in recent years. Thereafter, the literature review will unpack parental perceptions of digital media risks on children and explain why intensive parenting, digital media, and class form a key thrust of discussion on contemporary parenting practices, while also arguing for the need to investigate underexplored cultural elements. A description of the research methodology follows. The findings will then reveal insights on how the Vietnamese public and parents perceived the different types of digital media risks and agreed or disagreed on an emergent ideology of intensive parenting. The findings will place an emphasis on glocal tensions between YouTube/global tendencies and users/local cultures. The findings will also uncover the crucial role that a class-based distinction played in Vietnamese parents' strategies to respond to public pressure surrounding intensive parenting practices.

YouTube and the Child Safety Debate

YouTube has invited considerable public scrutiny over how (un)safe it is for children for at least the past decade, necessitating our attention to questions concerning digital media and parenting issues. Originally launched in 2005 as a hosting website for amateurish, user-generated content in the United States that was often juxtaposed against traditional broadcasting media, YouTube has rapidly grown to become a mainstream media platform (Burgess & Green, 2018). Currently the second most visited website only after Google, YouTube has secured 2.1 billion monthly active users worldwide in 2023 (Shepherd, 2023). YouTube has arguably become a common "digital babysitter," with 81% of parents in the United States with children aged 11 and below aware of their child watching YouTube videos (Smith, Toor, & van Kessel, 2018). In 2015, YouTube launched the separate app YouTube Kids to make it easier and safer for children to access age-appropriate content, alongside new functions of parental controls for sound, timer, and search settings (Ben-Yair, 2015).

Researchers who study the impacts of YouTube and associated forms of digital media (such as social media and digital devices) on young children have found that YouTube aids in innovative classroom

engagement, helps develop young children's budding media literacy skills, and teaches young children to be more thoughtful and responsible in their media use (see the literature review by Neumann & Heridou, 2020). On the other hand, YouTube exposes young children to large amounts of advertisements, which can then lead to early consumerism (Neumann & Heridou, 2020), or deleterious "challenges" that encourage self-harm such as choking and mimicking suicidal behaviors for social media attention and peer approval (Ahern, Sauer, & Thacker, 2015; Defenderfer, Austin, & Davis, 2016).

Notably, YouTube's child-safety measures have been questioned after a string of high-profile scandals that hit the headlines of major newspapers, enraged concerned parents, and sparked enduring disputes over whether automation can serve as a substitute for human intervention. One notable harmful trend highlighted by the *New York Times* is imitation content of popular kids' shows containing violent and lewd themes (such as PAW Patrol characters pretending to die by suicide or Spiderman urinating on Elsa) that slipped past even YouTube Kids' filtering artificial intelligence (AI)-based algorithm, while the video-flagging function responding to parents' reporting inappropriate content requires more time and manpower than AI (Maheshwari, 2017). In September 2017, Google was fined \$170 million by the Federal Trade Commission for violating the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) through its illegal gathering of children's personal data without parental consent, selling the data to advertisers, and then targeting children with advertisements (Singer & Conger, 2019). In an effort to address these regulatory concerns altogether since early 2020, YouTube has introduced changes such as banning target advertising and disabling the comment feature for viewers of children-aimed content, as well as requiring all video producers to designate whether their videos are made for children (Singer, 2020). At the time of this research, the effects of these safeguard measures remain to be seen, but debates about YouTube's child safety and support for parents continue—for example, whether YouTube Kids' fixed auto-play function helps curate children-oriented content on behalf of parents or takes control away from parents (Heilweil, 2021).

This study does not seek to negate any potential and established benefits that research has found of digital media and YouTube on children's learning and development. Its chosen focus is instead on how the Vietnamese public and parents perceive and debate digital media risks on child viewers and the responding rising culture of intensive parenting. This focus has much potential for development given recent pertinent debates in the West on YouTube's child safety policy and a notable research gap on digital media and parenting culture in Vietnam and the Global South. Existing debates surrounding YouTube's child safety can go beyond the discussion of the pros and cons of an algorithm-based curation system to be more inclusive of underrepresented communities with their culturally specific challenges in navigating local practices within a global media landscape.

Literature Review and Research Questions

Parental Perceptions of Digital Media Risks on Young Children

Parental perceptions of children's complicated mediated environment and its associated parenting challenges are key dimensions that underpin this study's focus. In a heavily mediated age, it is highly challenging for parents to achieve a balance between maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for children online (Livingstone, Ólafsson, et al., 2017) while formulating their own parenting strategies. Even

as parents are determined to plan out and actualize media monitoring of their young children's online and device activities, they often face considerable practical challenges that cause them to feel guiltier about their parenting performance (Seo & Lee, 2017).

Parental mediation theory could provide some useful benchmarks for intensive parenting strategies in this regard. Rooted in television viewing, parental mediation theory posits three major strategies of monitoring children's media consumption, namely "restrictive mediation" (controlling and setting rules on children's media use), "active mediation" (actively discussing the media with children), and "covieing" (watching media content with children; Nathanson, 2001). Parental mediation theory has since evolved to capture the complexity of children's online gaming (Jiow, Lim, & Lin, 2017) and online activities (Jeffery, 2021). Jiow et al. (2017) revised parental mediation strategies into "gatekeeping" (regulating children's access to online gaming), "discursive" (discussing with children about online gaming), "investigative" (discussing with children to gain more understanding), and "diversionary" (directing children's attention away from online gaming). Jeffery (2021) additionally added novel strategies such as "physical observation, digital surveillance," and "talking with (other) parents."

There is considerable empirical evidence on the various risks that digital media consumption may have on child viewers (Ahern et al., 2015; Defenderfer et al., 2016; Neumann & Heriditou, 2020). Parents' perceptions of digital media risks on young children have been categorized by Ebbeck, Yim, Chan, and Goh (2015) into four major domains, including physical risks (such as vision deterioration and an inactive lifestyle), intellectual risks (such as media addiction and viewing unsafe content), emotional risks (such as poor social-emotional development and instant gratifications), and social risks (such as poor social competence and communication skills). As children grow into adolescents, the range of risks further expands to include sexual risks (such as online sexual exploitation, grooming, and abuse), privacy risks (such as online exchange of personal information), and peer-related risks (such as cyberbullying) (Livingstone, Nandi, Banaji, & Stoilova, 2017).

What remain steadfastly underexplored are other contextual and cultural elements that illuminate glocal tensions between the globalized media environment and the local everyday life, as experienced by parents and children in the Global South (Parameswaran, 2013). These findings have the potential to reshape the above-mentioned, well-studied types of media risks from a less Western-centric angle. This study's focus on Vietnam will fill this gap. I propose the first research question as follows:

RQ1: What types of digital media and YouTube-related risks (especially culturally) on child viewers are identified (1) in a public news and discussion site and (2) by Vietnamese parents?

Intensive Parenting Ideology and Digital Media

How societies perceive digital media risks is closely linked to societal pressure demanding that parents pay substantial attention to their children to actively monitor them. Lee et al. (2014) argued that Western societies have increasingly seen risks as an outlook in which "possibilities that are untoward" rather than neutral "probabilities" (p. 11). The unknown in everyday life is associated with anxiety, uncertainty, and free-floating "what-ifs," rather than perceived as challenges that can be confronted rationally. When

the topics of children and new media enter the risk-framed equation, children are deemed especially vulnerable: from teenage pregnancy and trouble-making tendencies to deviance and criminal activities, online and offline (Lee et al., 2014). Western contemporary parenting culture has arguably adopted what Furedi (2014) called a “parental determinism” viewpoint. In other words, society assumes that children are their parents’—rather than the larger community’s—responsibility and that the quality of parenting has a causal link with children’s development throughout their lives and its social outcomes. Parents constantly face social pressure and/or public surveillance toward “doing the right thing,” such as breastfeeding. This is especially true when parenting is considered more of a job with a required skill set identified by parenting experts armed with scientific research (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014). Although the Western world is arguably safer than ever, an amplified parental deterministic way of thinking is heavily influenced by society’s high levels of perceiving risk. This in turn precipitates the notion of intensive parenting that stokes up fears and severely undermines the agency of parents and children in the name of protection (Furedi, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Ungar, 2009).

Digital media are central to how contemporary society and parents define ideologies of intensive parenting. In the case of YouTube specifically, YouTube’s open-ended online environments and lack of clear moral authority for child users have been connected to “social anxieties and media panics” over their potentially detrimental effects on young viewers (Burgess & Green, 2018, pp. 26–28). Additionally, online discussion forums are important and prominent sites where parents come to seek informational and emotional support and/or where the public imposes scrutiny and judgment for parenting practices that do not match dominant ideologies of childrearing. Examples of parenting topics subject to public debates on discussion forums include single, divorced, and queer parents, good versus bad parenthood, and parents’ choice of breastfeeding their babies, with negligible attention on families’ media use (Ammari, Schoenebeck, & Romero, 2019; Pedersen, 2016). In this sense, this study’s choice to focus on a public parenting discussion site and digital media is to appropriately tease out how the Vietnamese public and parents make sense of and co-construct a socially acceptable ideology of intensive parenting amid rising perceptions of digital media risks.

To better accommodate the dynamic of how the public and parents engage with the ideology of intensive parenting, I propose RQ2 as follows:

RQ2: What emerging ideology of intensive parenting in the presence of digital media risks can we identify (1) on a public news and discussion site and (2) by Vietnamese parents?

Intensive Parenting and Class

Studies of intensive parenting practices have advanced over time through distinct but related concepts mostly in Western societies, such as Hays’s (1996) “intensive parenting,” Lareau’s (2003) “concerted cultivation,” Lim’s (2020) “transcendent parenting,” and Nelson’s (2010) “parenting out of control,” with Lim (2020) shifting the focus away from the West to Singapore. In these works, class plays a critical role in explaining the variations of intensive parenting practices and deserves our continued attention when examined in a novel context like Vietnam.

Hays (1996) explores parents' intensive labor to fulfill unyielding societal standards, especially for mothers who bear the brunt of parenting stress because of traditional gender norms. This ideology includes giving the child the finest material possessions and investing in the child's extracurricular attendance in the arts and personal development to offer them a competitive edge over their peers. Unpacking class-based motivations to further explain when and how overinvolved parenting takes place and why not all childhoods are "equal," Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation argues that middle-class parents in the United States are in a better position and more skillful than poorer parents to undertake significant duties such as helping their children navigate the education system and make use of social capital for self-improvement. This subsequently helps middle-class children become more confident and integrate better into society. Clearly, class significantly shapes how parents could enact and respond to societal demands of intensive parenting duties.

Amid technological changes that traverse offline and online realms, the theorization of intensive parenting has been progressively influenced by communication networks and devices. Nelson (2010) details parental hypervigilance in keeping a tab on children's lives and well-being using technological means. Expanding Lareau's (2003) analytical linking between overinvolved parenting and class, Nelson (2010) further argued that professional middle-class parents in the United States are more inclined than their middle- or working-class counterparts to adopt the style of "parenting out of control" to hover over their children and push them toward higher achievements (Nelson, 2010, p. 3). They do so through baby monitors, highly frequent mobile phone calls, or GPS devices to demand children's updates from infancy to college, thereby delaying launching their overprotected children into adulthood.

The prominence of communication technologies was further dissected in Lim's (2020) transcendent parenting, where mobile devices, messaging apps, and homeschool communication apps cause parents to engage in an apparent ceaselessness of parenting duties. Be it tracking how many points the teachers rewarded their children on ClassDojo or texting another parent on WhatsApp for updates, transcendent parenting requires a higher level of technical prowess from parents and an always-on alertness to their children's digital activities. Although Lim (2020) has adeptly discussed how middle-class, intensive parenting practices in an Asian setting like Singapore is different from Western contexts, she has not uncovered how these intensive parenting practices could be subject to additional challenges, either culturally (such as glocal tensions) or class-based (such as not just among middle-class parents but among parents of different class statuses). Considering these underexplored issues, RQ3 is:

RQ3: What role does a class-based distinction play in Vietnamese parents' strategies when responding to public pressure surrounding intensive parenting practices (especially culturally)?

Methodology

I deployed "netnography"—a methodology of online ethnography that is an application of cultural anthropology for the study of digital networks and social media (Kozinets, 2020). Originally developed in fandom studies and introduced into consumer research in 1996, netnography has since been widely used in the academic fields of marketing, communication, and tourism. Centered on the study of online traces and particularly suited to public discourse on social media, netnography emphasizes a cultural approach to

understanding and making meanings from interactions and community engagement, especially through interactive media platforms (Kozinets, 2020).

I engaged in netnography's three distinct operations of data collection: *investigation*, *immersion*, and *interaction* using purposive sampling. These three data collection operations can be used together or separately depending on the research needs (Kozinets, 2020). For this research, I have carried out all three of them instead of only one or two of them for a better variability of the collected data. I started with a three-month online engagement in early 2020 with news articles and their corresponding public commentary sections on a major Vietnamese online news site, VnExpress. Established in 2001 by FPT (a Vietnamese corporation focusing on technology and telecommunication services and solutions), VnExpress was Vietnam's first entirely online newspaper. VnExpress has reportedly become the most popular online news site in Vietnamese internationally (Cong An Nhan Dan, 2011; Thang, 2021) and is entirely free to read.

For netnography's investigation operation, I first used VnExpress' built-in article search tool to filter out and carefully read any retrieved online articles between 2017 and 2019 that explicitly discussed YouTube in relation to children and families' media consumption. VnExpress allows any public users to post their reactions and opinions in a commentary section right below each published news article. I included only articles that had elicited public comments underneath their body text and excluded those without any public reaction, even if the news content was relevant. The public comments on VnExpress were active, interactive, diverse, and rich, thus fulfilling the requirement of netnography's data selection (see Kozinets, 2020). For netnography's immersion operation, I downloaded all the news articles and their public comments in their entirety and then continued to reread and engage with their content concurrently while keeping an immersion journal to write down my thoughts, reflections, and reactions throughout the data collection process. All the news articles and comments are in Vietnamese. Being a Vietnamese native, I did not encounter any language or cultural barriers in the data collection and analysis processes. As I started to have a better grasp of my investigative and immersive data, I moved on to netnography's interaction operation by collecting online, audio-based interviews in July 2020 with six parents (5 females, 1 male) in Vietnam whose children (aged 3 to 15) consumed digital media, including YouTube, daily. The parents were recruited using convenience and purposive samplings via an online research flyer disseminated through my professional networks of fellow teachers and researchers in Vietnam. The online interviews took place during the early waves of the pandemic in mid-2020 when work- and study-from-home were already implemented at all times or on selective days of a week. At that time, Vietnam was very successful in containing the spread of the pandemic with nonserious disruptions to their citizens' daily lives. The interviewed parents were overwhelmingly female because it was extremely challenging to recruit male subjects who would agree to be interviewed in-depth by me, a total stranger to them online. I probed for the various ways in which they monitored the children's YouTube and digital device use and any related parenting challenges. The parents were reimbursed with a grocery voucher upon completing their interviews.

My finalized data set comprises 43 news articles and 1,460 public comments from VnExpress, as well as 65 pages of transcripts from more than six hours of interview recordings. The average interviewed parent in this sample was 36.33 years old. All of them were of the middle class and from urban areas in Ho Chi Minh City. For data analysis, I used open and axial coding to analyze the content of the articles, comments, and transcripts. I then undertook a process of hermeneutic interpretation of the texts, using netnographic operations such as

theming, totalizing, translating, turtling, and trouble-making to connect, critique, and conceptualize the data (Kozinets, 2020). All screen names on VnExpress and identifiable information of the interviewed subjects are anonymized. All translation of the data into English was done by me.

Findings and Discussion

An Overview of the News Articles Data

Given how the news reports data prompted the public discussion analyzed for this study, it is crucial to look at the 43 sampled articles' standpoints on the risks of YouTube. YouTube and digital media were acknowledged as being wildly popular among Vietnamese young children aged approximately eight and below. Most articles (72%) explicitly held the position that YouTube was not child-friendly because of sexual, violent, or wrongful content or that its tremendous appeal resulted in overconsumption. One example includes an article titled "Only Lazy Parents Let Their Children Watch YouTube During Meals" (Nguyen, 2018). This article published a commentary by a self-identified parent who condemned other parents' overreliance on YouTube to babysit their children. The other 14% of the articles took a more positive stand and argued that YouTube could offer children educational gains or that YouTube was taking action to improve child safety standards. The remaining 14% covered miscellaneous topics.

RQ1. Digital Media and YouTube-Related Risks on Children

I found that the public discourse and Vietnamese parents identified three main types of YouTube-related and digital media risks for child viewers approximately aged eight and below, either morally, developmentally, or culturally (in order of decreasing prevalence). These three types of risks significantly overlap with others already identified by scholars in the United Kingdom (Livingstone, Ólafsson, et al., 2017) and Singapore (Ebbeck et al., 2015), but they did not venture into risks associated with older adolescents, such as cyberbullying and privacy risks, because of the news articles' focus on younger children. Notably, the Vietnamese news articles covered a type of risk (cultural) that has not been uncovered in existing Western-centric scholarship.

Specifically, an overwhelming number of public comments and most of the interviewed parents clearly indicated frustration, perplexity, or even anger at the abundance of crude (oversexualized content where body parts were flaunted), violent (outdoors thrill-seeking challenges where people do not take personal safety seriously), or offensive YouTube content (content with cursing and age-inappropriate language and topics). A high alert to digital media's potential and tangible harmful influence was widely shared across the discussion forum and interviewed parents. The subjects strongly perceived that certain YouTube content could adversely affect children's personality and intellectual development or warp their understanding of the world. Entertainment content geared toward adult audiences without being outright violent or lewd (such as music parodies) was also considered unsafe or noneducational (therefore, nonbeneficial) for children, corroborating past findings on East and Southeast Asian parents' valorization of academic achievements and parental involvement in their children's academic socialization, especially in a high-stakes testing system (Kim, 2019; Lim, 2020).

Importantly, VnExpress emerged as a rich and interactive online research site under the netnography method (Kozinets, 2020), where anyone from the public, self-identified parents, or commenters of unidentified parenting background actively and passionately engaged each other in a wide variety of topics related to parenting and digital media. Their discussions comprised acknowledging certain parenting practices as healthy and worth encouraging, complaining about media risks and the so-called “bad” parents, accusing one another of being incompetent parents, justifying to themselves that they were not bad parents, and chiding bad parents into adopting a more socially accepted parenting ideology. This discursive space, at first glance, may look like an egotistic or superficial one where seemingly competitive parents and spectators simply came to brag, compare, compete, or insult each other. But the large number, length, and variety of these online comments clearly demonstrate the deep and diverse thinking on parenting and media influences that might not have been as holistically captured in an offline setting. For example, in lamenting YouTube-related moral risks for young children, many commenters did not hold back in expressing their disapproval of inappropriate YouTube content and were enthusiastic in building their opinions on the backs of other commenters on the same topics, such as “YouTube is just offensive and sexualized” (personal communication, March 4, 2019), and “Social media is where we can’t tell the real from the fake, where there is a concoction of different cultural and thinking trends. Don’t ever let social media negatively affect your real life” (personal communication, March 4, 2019).

That someone would assert that YouTube “is just offensive and sexualized” or that “Stupidity [on YouTube] is vibrant” (personal communication, March 4, 2019) seems too black and white, if not extreme, a perspective. But underneath these rhetorical choices is deep frustration, or perhaps anger at YouTube’s lack of child safeguarding measures that had driven this public group of commenters to gather and dissect these media risks together, through a written medium, to make sense of an everyday phenomenon they cared about.

Vietnamese YouTubers who gained popularity and massive earnings with sensational, clickbait content were another node of moral concern that prompted lively online commentary. This thread of argument intensified when coupled with idol culture that is often frowned upon by the older generation in Vietnam for its perceived lack of contribution to traditional virtues such as loyalty to the nation and family values (Phan, 2014). We have this public comment, for example: “Fewer people watch videos with good content, but millions of young viewers watch this terrible content and idolize a person without any virtues? I really don’t understand” (personal communication, April 2, 2019).

This comment above was in response to a news article covering the case of a 26-year-old male Vietnamese YouTuber named *Khá Bánh* (translatable as either “pretty cool-looking” or “a person named Khá who looks cool”; *Khá Bánh Entertainment*, 2019). The expressed puzzlement by the commenter seems understandable given that *Khá Bánh* reportedly had criminal records and frequently used offensive language in his videos. Yet that he still had 2 million YouTube subscribers and earned up to USD\$20,000 per month speaks volumes to the reality that YouTube is a revenue-driven platform that prioritizes large viewership and accommodates sensational content creators as long as their production is not outrageously offensive.

The second type of YouTube-related risks for children—developmental risks—were also agreed upon by both the public and the parents. Their perceived developmental risks pertain to how consuming

YouTube content and interacting with the accompanying device (such as smartphones or tablets) in a rather abstract sense of long hours (that varied from parent to parent) or being repeatedly exposed to rampant inappropriate language online could negatively impact children's burgeoning physical and language development. As shared by one of the mothers I interviewed: "The kids will become physically inactive, their eyesight will deteriorate, they will mimic improper language from YouTube" (mother, 37 years old, banker).

Clearly, there existed a collective appreciation of YouTube's free service, convenient interface, and varied types of content and languages. However, many comments pinpointed one major concern that was becoming a common norm observed by both commenters who self-identified as parents and who did not: Vietnamese parents' overreliance on YouTube to babysit their children during meal times despite its possible negative effects on the children's digestive health. Depression, deterioration of eyesight, digestion issues, and speech problems were listed among the many perceived risks for children's emotional, physical, and cognitive development, as found in previous research on young children's use of digital devices (Ebbeck et al., 2015; Neumann & Heridou, 2020).

Although the public and parents (either self-identified online or through online interviews) shared the same perceptions of moral and developmental risks from YouTube and digital media, there was pronounced disagreement in whether and how they considered YouTube a foreign cultural threat that could overrule traditional Vietnamese heritage. This has to do with the third perceived cultural risk on Vietnamese children, or the public anxiety surrounding the tensions between YouTube/global versus users/local cultures. On the one hand, some applauded YouTube's international and cosmopolitan content. On the other hand, others with a binary viewpoint perceived YouTube as a Western-centric media force with powerful content that could threaten local Vietnamese users' language use and appreciation of being a Vietnamese while mostly ignoring the parents' or child's agency in reconfiguring global content. Specifically, a news article features a commentary by a self-identified parent who championed YouTube's alleged pedagogical prowess for teaching their children English and preparing them for better academic achievements when they grow older. Titled "My Child Speaks English Like a Native Speaker Thanks to YouTube," the parent cheerfully wrote:

Many people do not believe this, but we did not let our children attend any English classes. Ever since our children were born, they have been woken up every morning with English songs from YouTube. When they were bigger, we allowed them to watch Peppa Pig while playing with toys. YouTube is a giant treasure of English vocabulary organized in a systematic way that is easily retrieved with online searches. My children can't get enough of YouTube. (Chang, 2019, paras. 7–10)

Responding to this optimistic view about YouTube's educational potential, two commenters revealed a drastically different viewpoint, the first of whom possessed a rather caustic undertone probably because of the anonymous nature of the comment sections on VnExpress, and the second of whom firmly asserted nationalistic sentiments. The first one wrote, "I am sure that it will reach a point where your two children will no longer use Vietnamese to communicate with other people. And you will regret your decision then" (personal communication, November 15, 2019). The second one added, "English is important [in Vietnam] but there is no need for a Vietnamese to learn English from a very young age" (personal communication, November 15, 2019).

As shown, YouTube content—even when undoubtedly educational and possessing immense potential for knowledge acquisition in children—was at the center of a heated debate for its perceived Western-centric cultural values that are not always in line with Vietnamese children’s supposedly ideal media consumption and social interaction. In this regard, this study has helped draw linkages between theories from parenting studies (see Lee et al., 2014) and different types of digital media risks. I have demonstrated that existing debates surrounding YouTube’s child safety need to go beyond discussing the pros and cons of an algorithm-based curation system and only moral or developmental risks (see Ebbeck et al., 2015) to also include cultural tensions. Specifically, we need to pay more attention to underrepresented markets like Vietnam where YouTube and other global media platforms have been widely adopted in the domestic space with their culturally specific but overlooked challenges.

RQ2. Ideology of Intensive Parenting in the Presence of Digital Media

There was significant social pressure that parents should be proactive in sheltering their children from potential risks, a failure of which would result only in parents blaming themselves for being “bad” parents. Clearly, this is a projection of the parental determinism (Furedi, 2014) viewpoint, or a belief in the causal link between parenting skills and the child’s growth. Such social pressure was visible on VnExpress and amplified into a form of public surveillance where heated back-and-forth exchanges of viewpoints were ignited among commenters who self-identified as parents and those who did not, as shown in the following segment. One commenter condemned parents’ reliance on YouTube as a manifestation of parental irresponsibility:

A reliance on technology demonstrates a lack of love, patience, and parenting efforts among parents these days. Then they will blame any negative consequences on the school, on society, and insist that their child “is such a good child at home.” (personal communication, October 17, 2018).

Alongside these sentiments and perspectives in defining what makes a “good” Vietnamese parent, both the public and interviewed parents generally agreed on one dominant ideology of media-related intensive parenting that theoretically overlaps with Hays’s (1996) intensive parenting and Nelson’s (2010) parenting out of control. They also align with established cultural studies literature on Vietnam’s culturally specific childrearing notions that centralize the child in domestic activities and prioritize the child as the family’s source of happiness and fortune (Mestechkina et al., 2014). Under this socially accepted ideology, Vietnamese parents are expected (if not pressured) to assert their hypervigilance (if not restriction) on their children’s access to devices, YouTube, and their online content consumption and keep tabs on their children’s well-being at all times. This ideology, thus, strongly resonates with parental mediation strategies already highlighted in past literature, such as restrictive mediation (Nathanson, 2001), gatekeeping (Jiow et al., 2017), and physical observation (Jeffery, 2021). One commenter asserted, “For children under 14, no Internet whatsoever unless there’s an adult nearby. Always be alert!” (personal communication, May 22, 2018).

This protectionist agenda was expected to be conducted to the best of the parents’ capabilities, and even in the face of physical and emotional exhaustion (see also Hays, 1996; Mestechkina et al., 2014). In one commentary thread, one parent candidly disclosed more details as to why they struggled to restrict their child’s YouTube use even when they understood its associated risks: “I am exhausted every day after

work. YouTube is my solution. You can laugh at me if you want. But maybe try running 10 km and then babysitting a child?" (personal communication, October 17, 2018).

Other commenters counterargued with their own authority as fellow parents to reinforce the central role Vietnamese parents are expected to undertake to uphold the intensive parenting ideology under discussion. For example, one commenter wrote, "You are just making excuses. My house is 25 km away from my company. But if it's time for a meal, my son has to sit in his chair, no TV, no YouTube" (personal communication, October 17, 2018). Another commenter chimed in,

I remember what my mother told me, "If you are having an easy life now, then your children will have a tough life later." You don't have to resort to letting your child watch YouTube while eating. You have to play with your child, even if housework has already taken away the bulk of your time. (personal communication, October 17, 2018)

The dominant parenting ideology revealed here is not simply a task-oriented or strictly digital media-based approach. It prescribes a moral balance between risk management from the child's digital media consumption and nurturing aspects of parental care that would require keen investment in parent-child cooperation, perhaps to accord with the traditional goal of building a harmonious and warm Vietnamese family (Mestechkina et al., 2014).

RQ3. Parents' Response: Glocal Tensions and Class-Based Distinction

While the public and parents agreed on one dominant ideology of intensive parenting that involves hypervigilance of the children's media access and consumption, debates emerged when YouTube was considered a cultural threat to traditional Vietnamese values. As a high volume of public comments perceived YouTube as disseminating foreign cultural norms that the Vietnamese public might find foreign or hard to accept, the interviewed Vietnamese parents indeed found themselves having to maneuver such glocal tensions on top of their painstaking efforts to monitor their children's screen time and YouTube activities. These interviewed parents—all of whom were of the middle class—adamantly recognized their child's access to YouTube and digital devices as a parenting strategy to confer a greater advantage to their children later. They deviated from public pressure by prescribing that parents should not let their children view too much YouTube to maintain their own cultural heritage through class-based decisions. Echoing Lareau's (2003) theorization on class-based motivations behind intensive parenting to help the child harness more social capital and navigate the education system in the United States, all the interviewed parents rationalized their continuing utilization of YouTube and smart devices instead of shunning them, as an intention, a privilege, and a well-laid plan that only more well-off families could afford. In the words of one interviewed parent:

You see, not everyone is able to afford smartphones and tablets for their children to access online resources. I do not wish my daughters to be overloaded with after-class tuition cramming sessions and pressured to score well like other typical Vietnamese children. Instead, she learns both Vietnamese and English through YouTube Kids and apps. In the future, if she is able to find opportunities outside of Vietnam, I will be ready to [financially] support her chosen path. (father, 37 years old, business owner)

The traditional formula of success that an average Vietnamese parent imposes on the child includes a good domestic K-12 education and a heavy load of after-class tutoring sessions in Vietnamese to help attain satisfactory academic results for a prestigious domestic, Vietnamese-speaking college. Forgoing this typical route, this father strongly believed that YouTube's readily available English language lessons and international content could serve as the foundations for his child's academic achievement and cosmopolitan outlook as they grew up. These desirable qualities were seen as the building blocks to prepare their children for acquiring a scholarship and acceptance from a college overseas five to 10 years down the road—a plan that they would be ready to support financially. YouTube can help offer an alternative route of parenting and success that is less reliant on a shadow education, replete with nontraditional opportunities that working class and less wealthy parents likely could not sustain.

This father's meaning-making process, in which YouTube and digital devices were associated with such a class-conscious, long-term intensive parenting strategy against a more conservative way of thinking is especially illuminating. It demonstrates that YouTube and digital media have a deep involvement and an immense influence in contemporary Asian society with both modern and conservative values challenging and influencing each other like in Vietnam. Vietnamese parents are finding themselves caught in pronounced glocal tensions like past research on Filipino, Malaysian, South Korean, and Taiwanese families (see Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2020). While all Vietnamese parents must discern the complex glocal forces at play to reconfigure their childrearing practices, wealthier parents could have more options to guide their children's digital media use and academic pursuits in a more transnational and innovative manner.

Conclusion

As the main socialization agent for their young children in a heavily mediated world, parents constantly balance digital media opportunities and risks, intense social pressure on being a competent parent, as well as cultural tensions between a global media landscape and their local practices. The understudied context of Vietnam has presented an appropriate space to expand the discussion on intensive parenting that heretofore was largely Western-centric (Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Nelson, 2010).

Contributing to existing literature on parental perceptions of digital media risks (Ebbeck et al., 2015) and intensive parenting culture (Furedi, 2014; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Lim, 2020; Nelson, 2010; Ungar, 2009), this research provides updated and culturally specific insights into parenting practices in Vietnam as permeated by global digital media. Glocal tensions between the globalized media environment and local values were overlooked in previous research. These cultural tensions have come to the fore when empirically examined from the perspectives of both the Vietnamese public and parents. The public and less wealthy parents prescribed more conservative values and considered YouTube a Western, intrusive force that was threatening Vietnam's local heritage. But middle-class parents were more open to embracing YouTube's global potential to prepare their children for future opportunities beyond their local context.

Bridging existing literature from cultural and media studies, this netnography has also revealed illuminating insights on what constitutes an intensive parenting ideology in the presence of digital media risks. A unanimous parental determinism viewpoint (Furedi, 2014) pressured Vietnamese parents to engage in one socially acceptable ideology of intensive parenting where parents needed to engage in labor-intensive and emotionally absorbing childrearing practices (see Hays, 1996) with hypervigilance (see Nelson, 2010) on the

children's media access and consumption. This ideology also prescribed traditionally inclined moral codes for Vietnamese parents to strike a balance between close media monitoring and creating a warm, nurturing domestic space for their children. YouTube and digital media have provided a useful interpretive frame to make sense of an intensive parenting culture in contemporary Vietnam. As posited by Clark (2013), traditional ways of family communication need to be rethought with digital media since they change the relationships between family members and (re)shape our society's options for technologies and social change.

Class remains an important factor in explaining variations of intensive parenting practices. Nelson (2010) posited that more well-off and educated parents would be more inclined to use digital media to hover over their children for their betterment. However, the Vietnamese public and all six interviewed parents agreed that the ideology of parental hypervigilance of Vietnamese children's YouTube and digital media use should be fulfilled almost at all times. The findings suggested that digital media had become so commonly used by most Vietnamese families that intensive parenting practices using technological means were no longer the prerogative of richer and more educated families. A class-based distinction more aligned with Lareau (2003) existed where, on one hand, parents with fewer financial means deemed YouTube a cultural threat to Vietnamese children's heritage preservation. On the other hand, wealthier parents with more financial capital championed the educational potentials of YouTube, planned out an alternative route of success with globalized opportunities for their children, and seemed emotionally ready to navigate global tensions arising from their choice.

Parental discretion in a digital future is determined by a confluence of factors. These include childrearing skills, parental emotional maturity, digital literacy, adaptability, and appropriate monitoring strategies (Lim, 2020; Livingstone, Ólafsson, et al., 2017). The study's contextualized findings from a Global South society empirically highlight that intensive parenting in the digital age undoubtedly requires the additional ability to navigate intricate cross-cultural relationships.

Given that only Vietnamese parents in urban areas were interviewed, the findings from this study are not representative of all parents in Vietnam or of parents in other contexts. The next step would be to conduct ethnographic analyses on how families negotiate, transform, or resist ideologies of intensive parenting in their natural domestic setting. Future research should provide more culturally nuanced theorization and investigations of global media platforms' influence on parenting practices in underexamined societies with pronounced cultural tensions.

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