

From Family to Digital Space: Reconstructing Parental Authority in Islamic Character Education among Millennial Families

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Abstract

This study examines how digital gaming reshapes parental authority in Islamic character education among millennial families. Using a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted in Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, with eleven millennial parents selected purposively. Data were generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings identify a gradual digital authority shift driven by limited parental accompaniment, insufficient supervision after providing digital devices, children's intensive exposure to online games, and limited parental digital literacy. Parents' accounts and field observations associated this shift with weaker discipline in religious practice, declining respectful communication with parents, and reduced self-control and responsibility. Parents responded through four adaptive strategies: negotiating rules for device duration and use, rebuilding parent-child emotional bonds, integrating Islamic values into everyday routines, and using digital media selectively as a character-education resource. The study proposes a digital authority shift model in which parental authority is reconstructed through relational presence, value-based mediation, and adaptive digital guidance rather than restriction alone.

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Introduction

Digital media have fundamentally altered the ecology of childhood by relocating substantial portions of learning, leisure, peer interaction, identity formation, and social participation from exclusively physical settings into networked environments. Digital games are particularly consequential within this transformation because they no longer function merely as entertainment products; they increasingly operate as social spaces in which children communicate, collaborate, compete, acquire recognition, exchange information, and encounter behavioral models beyond the immediate supervision of adults. Research on children's metagaming demonstrates that gaming is surrounded by extensive activities such as strategizing, information seeking, discussion, content creation, and social exchange, while research on adolescent gamer identity shows that gaming practices can become embedded within wider cultural meanings, peer relationships, and identity construction (Kahila et al., 2021; Vilasís-Pamos & Pires, 2022; Commodari et al., 2024). At the same time, contemporary scholarship cautions against technologically deterministic interpretations in which digital exposure is assumed to produce uniformly negative developmental consequences. Major reviews indicate that associations between digital technology use and young people's well-being are heterogeneous, often modest, and strongly dependent on individual, social, and contextual

conditions (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Orben, 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022). Therefore, the more consequential question is not simply whether children play digital games or how long they remain online, but how digital gaming becomes embedded in everyday family life, what social and moral references children encounter through gaming communities, and how parents sustain educational influence when digital environments increasingly compete for children's attention and trust.

This transformation has important implications for parenting because digital environments have changed both the object and the mechanism of parental guidance. Traditional media mediation was often organized around relatively visible and location-bound media practices, whereas contemporary parents must negotiate personalized smartphones, persistent connectivity, multiplayer games, peer-to-peer communication, streaming ecosystems, algorithmically generated recommendations, and media practices that may occur beyond direct adult observation. Consequently, parental mediation has evolved from simple restriction toward a more differentiated constellation of practices encompassing restrictive mediation, active discussion, instructional mediation, co-use, monitoring, and autonomy-supportive guidance (Nikken & Oprea, 2018; Scott, 2022; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2022). Comparative and cohort studies further demonstrate that parental digital literacy, parental self-efficacy, communication quality, and the manner in which rules are negotiated substantially influence whether mediation becomes protective, conflictual, or ineffective (Huang et al., 2023; Bradt et al., 2024). Thus, contemporary parental authority cannot be conceptualized exclusively as the power to restrict access to technology. It increasingly depends on parents' capacity to remain credible interpreters of digital experiences, establish legitimate boundaries, maintain communication, and participate meaningfully in children's changing media worlds.

The importance of the family becomes even more apparent in research on intensive and problematic gaming. Recent longitudinal evidence indicates that parental support and adverse parenting experiences are associated with subsequent symptoms of Internet gaming disorder, suggesting that family relationships may constitute antecedent or conditioning factors rather than merely consequences of problematic gaming (She et al., 2022). Neurobehavioral evidence has similarly identified associations between family relationship quality and reward-related processes among adolescents with Internet gaming disorder, while intervention studies demonstrate that family-based therapy can reduce problematic gaming and improve relational functioning (Hwang et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2021). Furthermore, parental digital distraction itself may weaken relational availability. Longitudinal research on parental phubbing shows that parental absorption in smartphones can predict subsequent problematic smartphone use among adolescents, while related studies associate parental phubbing with diminished psychological-needs satisfaction, lower self-esteem, perceived parental rejection, and peer alienation (Geng et al., 2021; Xiao & Zheng, 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings challenge a simplistic causal narrative in which "gaming creates family problems." Instead, they support a relational perspective in which family processes, parental availability, digital behavior, and children's responses interact dynamically.

A useful theoretical basis for examining these processes is Social Learning Theory, particularly its emphasis on observational learning, modeling, reinforcement, and the social environments through which behavior is acquired and sustained. In digitally saturated childhoods, behavioral models are no longer concentrated within parents, teachers, and face-to-face peer groups. Children may repeatedly observe and receive reinforcement from online teammates, streamers, gaming

influencers, virtual characters, peer communities, and platform reward systems. Empirical studies of children's metagaming and adolescent gamer identity demonstrate that digital-game participation involves social observation, communication, collective interpretation, status formation, and the construction of cultural identities (Kahila et al., 2021; Vilasís-Pamos & Pires, 2022; Chen et al., 2024). From this perspective, digital games may constitute a powerful social-learning environment because they combine repeated models of conduct with rapid feedback, rewards, peer approval, and persistent interaction. Importantly, this does not imply that children mechanically imitate everything encountered online; rather, it suggests that the family now operates within a more pluralized socialization ecology in which parental models compete with alternative sources of behavioral reinforcement.

Social Learning Theory, however, does not fully explain how parents actively negotiate their children's digital environments. The present study therefore also draws on parental mediation and digital parenting perspectives, which conceptualize parents not only as gatekeepers but also as interpreters, facilitators, co-users, role models, and regulators of children's media engagement. Recent literature shows that active and supportive mediation can be more developmentally constructive than restriction alone, particularly when parents combine clear limits with explanation, autonomy-supportive communication, and meaningful participation (Scott, 2022; Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023). Gaming-specific studies reinforce this distinction. Parental mediation has been associated with adolescents' motives for online gaming, privacy-risk awareness, and problematic gaming patterns, while controlling restriction may produce different outcomes from rules communicated through autonomy-supportive relationships (Bradt et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Commodari et al., 2024). Accordingly, parental authority in this study is understood not merely as unilateral control or children's obedience but as parents' continuing relational and moral capacity to define boundaries, model values, interpret children's experiences, and remain legitimate sources of guidance within a digitally mediated social environment.

This theoretical problem acquires particular significance within Muslim families because parental authority is closely intertwined with the formation of religious and moral character. Islamic character education in family settings extends beyond formal religious instruction and encompasses habitual worship, moral exemplarity, respectful communication, responsibility, discipline, self-control, and the internalization of values through daily parental interaction. Indonesian research demonstrates that parenting patterns, religious beliefs, and parental digital literacy are interconnected with children's behavioral development, suggesting that the ability to mediate technology has become an increasingly important component of contemporary family education (Purnama et al., 2022; Asnawan et al., 2024). Other studies similarly emphasize that parents remain central agents in cultivating Islamic values through habituation, example, emotional support, communication, and religious routines despite increasing digital exposure (At-Taqiyyah & Salim, 2025). Thus, Islamic character education within digitally connected families involves a dual responsibility: protecting children from potentially disruptive digital practices while simultaneously equipping them with the moral and self-regulatory capacities required to navigate those environments independently.

The Indonesian context provides particularly important evidence for this discussion. Purnama et al. (2022) found that digital literacy plays a meaningful role in the relationship between parenting, religious beliefs, and child behavioral problems, demonstrating that parental religiosity alone does

not automatically ensure effective guidance in technologically mediated environments. Similarly, Hidayat showed that parents' digital-literacy capacities remain central to their ability to guide children's media use, whereas Harianti and Kurniawan (2022) identified associations between parental phubbing and dimensions of young people's mental well-being in Indonesia. Studies concerned more directly with character formation likewise demonstrate the challenge of reconciling digital participation and religious education. Tohet and Mauliza addressed online-game dependence through religious-character practices, while Yudi and Maryam found that digital literacy was relevant to the effectiveness of Islamic character education. Recent family-oriented scholarship further suggests that active parental supervision, communication, family time, religious habituation, and technological competence must be combined rather than implemented as isolated strategies (At-Taqiyyah & Salim, 2025; Asnawan et al., 2024). This evidence demonstrates that the challenge faced by Muslim families is not simply one of restricting technology, but of preserving meaningful moral socialization while children participate in increasingly autonomous digital environments.

Nevertheless, contemporary evidence also requires caution against equating greater digital exposure with moral or psychological deterioration. Systematic and umbrella reviews repeatedly show that the effects of digital media are heterogeneous and may vary according to individual vulnerabilities, motives, content, social contexts, and patterns of use (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022). Person-specific research further demonstrates that identical digital activities may be associated with positive, negative, or negligible outcomes across different young people (Beyens et al., 2020). Gaming research offers a comparable picture: problematic outcomes are more strongly connected with variables such as escapist motives, relational difficulties, parental monitoring, and social contexts than with gaming participation in isolation (Commodari et al., 2024). Therefore, the present study does not assume that digital games intrinsically undermine Islamic character or parental authority. Instead, it conceptualizes gaming as a potentially competing socialization environment whose influence may become stronger when parental presence, communication, digital competence, and value transmission are insufficiently sustained.

Despite the expanding scholarship, several important gaps remain unresolved. First, international studies have generated substantial evidence concerning parental mediation, family relationships, problematic gaming, parental phubbing, and adolescent well-being, but parental influence is generally operationalized through monitoring, mediation style, conflict, or behavioral risk rather than through the broader concept of parental authority as a relational and moral resource (She et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Bradt et al., 2024). Second, Indonesian studies on Islamic parenting and character education largely emphasize digital literacy, religious habituation, parental roles, or preventive practices, but provide limited process-level explanations of how children's intensive engagement with gaming communities may shift the locus of moral reference from family relationships toward digital peers and platforms (Purnama et al., 2022; Asnawan et al., 2024). Third, much research continues to conceptualize games primarily as exposure or risk, although contemporary game studies demonstrate that gaming constitutes a broader cultural and social ecology involving identity, peer norms, communication, status, and repeated social reinforcement (Kahila et al., 2021; Vilasís-Pamos & Pires, 2022; Chen et al., 2024). Consequently, research has not sufficiently explained how parental authority is gradually weakened, how that weakening affects Islamic character formation, and how parents subsequently reconstruct legitimate authority without

relying exclusively on prohibition and surveillance.

This gap is especially evident in research on millennial Muslim families in rural Indonesia, where technological penetration interacts with religious traditions, changing occupational patterns, intergenerational relationships, and local forms of family authority. Existing parental-mediation research explains how adults regulate children's media access; problematic-gaming research identifies family and psychological correlates; and Islamic-education scholarship explains the importance of moral exemplarity and religious habituation. Yet these bodies of knowledge remain insufficiently integrated. What remains underexplored is the process through which digital gaming becomes an alternative socialization space, parental authority is negotiated or displaced, and parents attempt to rebuild their moral influence through relational, educational, and digitally adaptive practices. The current manuscript specifically examines these dynamics among millennial parents in Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, where digital transformation intersects with Islamic and local family life.

The novel contribution of this study therefore lies in reframing digital parenting from a predominantly technical problem of device control into a relational problem of parental-authority reconstruction. Rather than presuming that gaming directly causes a decline in Islamic character, the study approaches digital games as a potentially competing source of socialization whose influence is mediated by parental presence, communication, digital literacy, moral modeling, and family relationships. Conceptually, the study brings Social Learning Theory into dialogue with parental-mediation scholarship and Islamic character education to understand parental authority as relational credibility rather than coercive control. Contextually, it extends predominantly Western digital-parenting literature by providing evidence from millennial Muslim families in a rural Indonesian setting. Empirically, it focuses not only on the emergence of weakened authority but also on the strategies through which parents attempt to regain meaningful influence over children's religious, moral, and digital lives. In doing so, the study advances a more culturally grounded understanding of digital parenting in which technological competence, emotional connection, religious habituation, and moral guidance operate as interconnected dimensions.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how digital gaming reshapes parental authority in Islamic character education among millennial families. More specifically, it seeks to analyze how the weakening of parental authority emerges as children become increasingly engaged with online gaming environments; to examine how this shift is manifested in everyday dimensions of Islamic character formation, particularly worship discipline, respectful conduct toward parents, self-control, and responsibility; and to identify the adaptive strategies through which millennial parents reconstruct parental authority and sustain Islamic character education in a digitally saturated family environment. Through these objectives, the study seeks to offer a process-oriented and culturally situated explanation of digital parenting that moves beyond the binary opposition between prohibition and unrestricted technological acceptance, emphasizing instead the reconstruction of moral authority through relational presence, value-based mediation, and adaptive digital guidance. These objectives remain consistent with the central questions and contribution already established in the manuscript.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the interaction between digital game use, parental authority, and Islamic character education among millennial families. A case study was

appropriate because it enables close examination of participants’ lived experiences within the sociocultural setting in which parenting practices occur (Hyett et al., 2014; Starman, 2013). The research was conducted in Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, a rural community experiencing rapid digital transformation while maintaining strong Islamic and local cultural traditions. Increasing internet access and smartphone ownership have made digital games such as Mobile Legends, Free Fire, Roblox, and PUBG Mobile part of many children’s daily routines, while parents simultaneously face the challenge of adapting to technological change and sustaining their role in Islamic character formation.

Participants were eleven millennial parents selected purposively according to three criteria: (1) membership in the millennial generation, (2) having school-aged children who regularly played digital games, and (3) active involvement in everyday parenting. Both mothers and fathers with varied educational backgrounds were included to capture different parenting experiences. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation during household visits, and document analysis. Interviews explored parents’ experiences, perceptions, strategies, and concerns regarding children’s gaming and Islamic character education (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Observations documented parent–child interaction, digital-device use, and family responses to gaming, while supporting materials such as family gadget rules, educational resources, and relevant digital artifacts were used to enrich contextual interpretation. Data collection continued until no substantially new information relevant to the study themes emerged.

Table 1. Informant profiles

No	Initials	Gender	Age	Residence
1	MIL1	Women	35	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
2	MIL2	Women	38	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
3	MIL3	Women	36	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
4	MIL4	Women	40	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
5	MIL5	Women	41	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
6	MIL6	Men	37	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
7	MIL7	Women	38	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
8	MIL8	Women	39	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
9	MIL9	Women	45	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
10	MIL10	Women	44	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency
11	MIL11	Men	42	Wonodadi Village, Plantungan District, Kendal Regency

Trustworthiness was strengthened through member checking and triangulation. Interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations were returned to participants for confirmation, clarification, or correction. Source triangulation compared accounts across participants, while methodological triangulation integrated evidence from interviews, observations, and documents. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Analysis proceeded concurrently with data collection through iterative coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation so that emerging patterns could inform subsequent fieldwork and remain grounded in participants’ experiences and the broader sociocultural context.

Result and Discussion

The Process of Parental Authority Crisis in Children's Islamic Character Formation among Millennial Families in the Digital Gaming Era

The findings indicate that the crisis of parental authority in the formation of children's Islamic character in millennial families is a gradual process influenced by changes in parenting patterns in the digital era. This process began with the increasing demands of work, social activities, and the busyness of parents which reduced the intensity of mentoring children, so gadgets are often used as a practical solution to fill children's free time without adequate supervision. This condition opens up opportunities for children to get to know and access various popular online games, such as Roblox, Mobile Legends, Free Fire, PUBG Mobile, Call of Duty, Counter-Strike, Point Blank, and Grand Theft Auto (GTA), which serves not only as a medium of entertainment, but also becomes a new social space that shapes patterns of interaction, ways of thinking, and daily habits. Through play, children internalize the language, values, and behaviors that develop in the gaming community, including competitive tendencies, the use of foul language, and increased play duration that reduces interaction with family. On the other hand, most parents admit the limitations of digital literacy so that they do not fully understand the characteristics, features, and risks of the games that their children play. This knowledge gap causes parental advice and control to be less effective because children trust the experiences gained from the digital world and peer groups. The accumulation of these conditions gives birth to a crisis of parental authority which is characterized by a shift in the source of values, knowledge, and exemplary from the family to the digital space, so that the process of internalizing Islamic character through communication, habituation, and example in the family becomes weaker and loses its influence on the moral development of children.

The crisis of parental authority in the formation of children's Islamic character in millennial families does not emerge abruptly, but develops through a process that takes place gradually in line with changes in family life patterns in the digital era. The initial stage of the process is marked by increasing demands on work, economic activities, and social busyness of parents which directly reduce the intensity of mentoring children. In such a situation, the use of gadgets is a practical solution to fill children's free time when parents work or complete other domestic activities. Although at first gadgets were given as a means of entertainment, the findings of the study show that the lack of supervision causes children to gain greater freedom in accessing various digital platforms. This freedom opens up space for children to interact with peers, follow digital game trends, and get to know various online games that are popular in their social environment. Thus, the decision of parents to provide access to gadgets not only affects the pattern of technology use, but also becomes the entrance to the formation of a new digital social environment for children. At this stage, family authority begins to shift slowly because some of the activities that previously took place through direct interaction with parents are starting to be replaced by children's interaction with digital devices. This phenomenon shows that changes in parenting patterns are the initial foundation for the emergence of a crisis of parental authority in millennial families who live amid increasingly massive digital technology developments.

"My husband and I actually don't deliberately let our children play cellphones continuously, but because we both work, sometimes no one accompanies us at home. Instead of the children going out unsupervised, I finally gave my cellphone to play at home. Over time, he often plays Mobile Legends with Roblox because he joins his friends. At first I thought it was just entertainment, but now when the cellphone is taken, he

immediately gets angry and finds it difficult to recite or study. I feel like I spend less time with my child because after work he prefers to play games instead of telling stories with us." (MIL7, interview, June 24, 2026)

The observation results reinforce the findings of the interview. During the field visit, the researchers found that almost all informant homes have provided internet access and smartphone devices that children can use without full parental supervision. In some families, children are seen playing online games immediately after school, before even changing clothes or interacting with other family members. Parents generally continue to carry out household activities or work while occasionally giving brief instructions to children without engaging in play activities or discussing the digital content accessed. This situation shows that the existence of gadgets is slowly taking over some of the assistance functions that were previously carried out directly by parents. Researchers also observed that children were more enthusiastic about their achievements in the game, such as level up or team victories, than their learning experiences at school or religious activities. This condition indicates that the digital space has developed into a social environment that has greater emotional appeal than family interactions. Thus, the crisis of parental authority in the early stages is not caused by a loss of concern for children, but by the limited time of mentoring which indirectly provides a wider space for digital media to take part of the function of socialization and the formation of children's daily experiences.

Entering the next stage, the research findings show that the intensity of children's interaction with digital games not only increases the frequency of play, but also forms a process of imitation of behavior that comes from the game environment and the community of players. Children do not just learn the mechanics of the game, but gradually internalize the language, communication styles, cooperation patterns, how to resolve conflicts, and the standards of success that develop in the game world. The findings indicate that games such as Mobile Legends, Free Fire, PUBG Mobile, Roblox, Call of Duty, Counter-Strike, Point Blank, and Grand Theft Auto (GTA) present virtual interaction spaces that allow children to communicate with players from various regions and even various countries. These interactions expand the child's social experience, but at the same time also introduce various forms of communication that are not entirely in harmony with the values of Islamic character. Some children begin to get used to using harsh language when facing defeat, show excessive competitive attitudes, and find it easier to imitate the behavior of other characters or players than the example set by parents at home. This condition shows that the process of forming children's character begins to be influenced by new socialization agents that have a higher intensity of interaction than the family. As a result, the values obtained through Islamic religious education in the family environment must compete with digital values, norms, and culture that continue to be present in children's daily lives through gaming activities that are carried out repeatedly and last for a relatively long duration.

"I was once surprised when children spoke rudely after playing games. At first I thought he was learning from school, but after I heard he was playing while wearing a headset, those words often came from his friends in the game. Sometimes if he loses, he gets angry, slams the pillow, and even his younger brother is scolded. I just realized that it wasn't just the game that was played, but the way he spoke and his habits were also carried over to the house. Since then I feel that watching children play games is much more difficult than I imagined." (MIL11, interview, June 27, 2026)

Field observations show that changes in children's behavior are seen not only when playing games, but also in daily interactions with family members and peers. Researchers found some

children spontaneously used terms derived from online games, such as mentioning wins, losses, rankings, or game strategies in casual conversation. On some occasions, children also seem to be more responsive to game notifications than parents' calls, even delaying praying or helping with homework because they want to finish the ongoing match. Another phenomenon that is quite prominent is the formation of friendship groups based on the similarity of the type of game played, so that the topic of children's conversation revolves more around game strategy, character purchases, or the achievement of certain levels. The results of this observation show that digital games have developed into a socialization space that shapes children's social identity as well as affects their communication patterns. In this context, the influence of the family on character formation becomes less and less because children get greater social reinforcement from the digital community than from the home environment. These findings indicate that the crisis of parental authority is not only related to the duration of playing games, but also to the increasingly strong process of internalizing digital culture that shapes children's ways of thinking, communication, and behavior patterns in daily life.

The final stage found in this study shows that the accumulation of limitations in parental assistance, the increasing intensity of digital game use, and the formation of the process of imitation of game culture lead to a crisis of parental authority in the formation of children's Islamic character. The crisis is marked by the shift in the position of parents as the main source of value, knowledge, and exemplary to a digital environment that offers a more interactive, responsive, and engaging experience for children. The findings indicate that when parents seek advice on discipline, communication ethics, time management, and the implementation of worship, some children show a tendency to consider more experience gained from the world of games or peer opinions rather than directions given by families. This shift not only reduces the effectiveness of communication between parents and children, but also weakens the process of internalizing Islamic character values that have been built through example, habituation, and emotional interaction in the family. The longer the duration of using the gadget, the less opportunities for families to have dialogues, learn religion together, and carry out activities that strengthen emotional bonds. Thus, the crisis of parental authority is not just a problem of declining children's obedience to family rules, but reflects a fundamental change in who is the main reference for children in shaping the way of thinking, making decisions, and interpreting life values. This phenomenon shows that the digital space has evolved into a socialization agent that gradually takes over some of the character education functions previously carried out by the family.

"I often advise my children to limit their playing time and be more diligent in studying, but the answer is always, 'Friends also play until night, that's okay.' Sometimes if I forbid him to play, he would look for excuses from the internet or his friends' stories to refute. I feel that now children believe more in what they see on their cellphones than what I convey as a parent. It's not that he doesn't respect me, but the influence of the game world and his friends is stronger than our advice at home." (MIL3, interview, June 29, 2026)

Observations indicate that the reduction of parental authority is seen in various daily family activities. During field visits, researchers observed that some children continued to play despite having been repeatedly called by their parents to eat, study, or perform prayers. In some families, the negotiation process regarding the duration of play lasts longer than the implementation of the rules themselves, so parents tend to relent to avoid conflicts with their children. Researchers also found that conversations in the family often contained brief instructions related to the use of gadgets rather than in-depth dialogues about learning experiences, moral development, or Islamic values. On the

other hand, children seem more enthusiastic about discussing game strategies, favorite characters, or the experience of playing with online friends. These interaction patterns show that the digital space has become the main reference in building children's identities, social relationships, and preferences. Based on the overall results of observations and interviews, this study interprets that the crisis of parental authority in millennial families is a consequence of the change in the ecology of parenting in the digital era, when the family is no longer the only center of socialization. In this context, the main challenge of Islamic character education is not only to limit the use of digital games, but also to rebuild the presence of parents as relevant, communicative, and able to accompany children in interpreting the various values they gain from the digital space.

Implications of Parental Authority Crisis for the Internalization of Children's Islamic Character Values in the Digital Gaming Era

The findings indicate that the crisis of parental authority in millennial families has significant implications for the process of internalizing Islamic character values in children in the digital gaming era. This impact is reflected in three main aspects, namely the weakening of discipline in carrying out worship, the decline in the quality of morals and manners to parents, and the reduction of self-control and responsibility. The reduced intensity of mentoring and supervision causes children to prioritize gaming activities over carrying out religious obligations, such as praying, reciting, and participating in other religious activities, so that the process of habituating Islamic values does not take place optimally. On the other hand, increasingly intense involvement in the digital gaming community encourages children to adopt communication patterns, language, and behaviors that develop in the gaming environment, including the use of less polite speech, emotional attitudes when the game is interrupted, and the tendency to ignore parental directions. This condition also affects the quality of relationships in the family and reduces the effectiveness of parental role models as a source of character education. In addition, the dominance of digital games in daily life causes children to experience difficulties in managing time, controlling the desire to play, and balancing entertainment activities with academic and religious responsibilities. As a result, Islamic character values, such as discipline, patience, responsibility, obedience, and self-control, are not internalized to the maximum, so that the crisis of parental authority has direct implications for the weakening of the foundation of the formation of children's religious character amid the development of digital culture.

The findings indicate that the weakening of worship discipline is the earliest implication seen from the crisis of parental authority in millennial families whose children actively play online games. This condition does not emerge abruptly, but begins with a decrease in the intensity of parental assistance due to the demands of work, social activities, and daily routines which causes supervision of the use of gadgets to become more loose. In this situation, children gain the freedom to set their own play time so that game activities slowly take over the space previously used to carry out worship, recite, and participate in religious activities in the surrounding environment. The findings indicate that some children prefer to complete the game or achieve the game target rather than immediately fulfilling the call to prayer, and some of them even postpone reciting until it is not carried out at all. This shift in priorities shows that digital games have formed a new routine pattern that is more dominant than the worship habits that were previously built in the family. As a result, the process of internalizing Islamic values through daily habituation does not take place consistently because parents lose the opportunity to provide supervision, example, and reinforcement to children's religious practices. In the long run, these conditions not only affect the discipline of carrying out

worship, but also weaken children's spiritual awareness because religious activities begin to be seen as an obligation that can be postponed when it conflicts with the pleasure of playing games.

One of the informants described the change as a problem that is increasingly difficult to control after children start actively playing online games. The informant said,

"In the past, before I knew the game, I immediately told them to pray and usually wanted to. Now he often says later because he is still playing with his friends. Sometimes one match is over and even the match continues again. I have reminded many times, but children often feel that games are more important than prayer or reciting. I'm worried that he will get used to postponing worship for a long time because he is too engrossed in playing." (MIL4, interview, June 24, 2026).

Field observations corroborated these findings. On several visits to the informant's house, researchers found that when the call to prayer was sounded, the child did not immediately stop playing games even though he had been called by his parents. Some children ask for extra time to complete the game, while others stay focused on the mobile phone screen while answering briefly that they will perform prayers after the game is over. Researchers also observed a decrease in the intensity of children participating in afternoon recitation activities in the surrounding environment because this time was more often used to play games with friends through the internet. Parental responses are generally limited to verbal reprimands without consistent action so that the child does not feel any clear consequences when ignoring the obligation of worship. This interaction pattern shows that parental authority in setting the priority of children's activities is starting to weaken. Thus, the reduction of worship discipline is not solely caused by the existence of digital games, but by the weakening of the capacity of parents to maintain religious habits amid the increasing dominance of digital culture in millennial family life.

The findings indicate that the crisis of parental authority also has implications for the decline in the quality of children's morals and manners toward parents as a result of the increasingly strong influence of the communication culture that is developing in the digital gaming community. The intensity of children's interactions with fellow players through voice chat features, live streaming, and social media connected to the game causes children not only to learn game strategies, but also to internalize communication patterns, emotional expressions, and how to respond to conflicts that are customary in the community. As a result, some children begin to use impolite language, argue when advised, show emotional attitudes when play activities are disrupted, and even ignore parental directions when focusing on the game. These findings show that the digital space has developed into a new socialization agent that slowly takes over part of the family's function in shaping children's behavior. If previously parents were the main source of learning manners through example and daily communication, now children often spend time in a digital environment that has communication norms that are different from the Islamic values taught in the family. This shift causes the process of internalizing morals to experience obstacles because children tend to imitate behaviors that are considered prevalent in the gaming community rather than practicing the values of politeness, respect for parents, and emotional control. Thus, the weakening of moral quality is not only influenced by the high intensity of playing games, but also by the reduction of family dominance as the main environment for the formation of Islamic characters.

"Now when I tell them to stop playing or help with homework, children often answer in a high tone. Sometimes words come out that I don't think are appropriate to say to parents. When I asked him where he learned to speak like that, he said he often heard his friends when playing games. I am sad because in

the past the children never argued like they do now, but after playing online a lot his attitude has changed and he is more easily angry when advised." (MIL8, interview, June 27, 2026).

The results of field observations show that these changes in the quality of morals are seen in the pattern of daily communication between children and parents. Researchers observed that some children continued to play games even when their parents were talking or asking for help, and some even gave short responses without distracting themselves from the mobile phone screen. In certain situations, the child shows an annoyed expression, raises the intonation of the voice, or shows a gesture of rejection when the game is forcibly stopped by the parent. Researchers also found that terms commonly used in gaming communities, including sarcastic and competitive expressions, began to carry over into everyday communication in the family environment. Although not all children show the same behavior, this tendency shows that communication norms in the digital space have influenced the way children interact with parents. These findings indicate that the crisis of parental authority is not only reflected in the child's reduced obedience to family directions, but also from the shifting standards of politeness and respect for parents that were previously built through the process of exemplarity and habituation in the family environment to be more influenced by the communication culture of the digital gaming community.

The findings of the study suggest that the next implication of the crisis of parental authority in millennial families is the reduction of children's self-control abilities and responsibilities as part of the formation of Islamic character. This condition appears when children have difficulty managing time, determining priorities, and distinguishing between needs and desires in daily life. The dominance of gaming activities causes children to be more oriented towards achieving game targets, such as increasing rank, completing missions, or obtaining virtual rewards (rewards), rather than fulfilling academic and religious obligations. As a result, various Islamic character values that have been built through habituation in the family, such as discipline, trust, patience, responsibility, and the ability to control lust, have not developed optimally. The findings of the study also show that some parents have difficulty applying the rules for using gadgets consistently. When children show rejection, cry, get angry, or continue to ask for extra play time, parents tend to provide tolerance so that the home situation remains conducive. This permissive parenting pattern indirectly strengthens children's behavior to prioritize momentary gratification rather than learning self-control. From the perspective of Islamic character education, this condition shows that the weakening of parental authority has reduced the effectiveness of the habituation process as the main foundation of character formation. As a result, children not only lose the ability to manage time proportionately, but also experience a decreased sense of responsibility for their obligations as a student, a child in the family, and a Muslim who has spiritual and social responsibilities.

"If you hold a cellphone to play games, children seem to forget everything. Schoolwork is often postponed, told to study later, asked to help with homework and wait for the game to finish. Even if the time for reciting has arrived, he still asks for one more match. Finally, many obligations were not completed on time because his mind just wanted to return to play immediately. We as parents are sometimes overwhelmed to keep reminding every day." (MIL11, interview, June 29, 2026).

Field observations showed that most children showed a tendency to focus on play activities rather than other responsibilities. During the research visit, researchers found that some children continued to play even though the textbooks were still open, homework had not been completed, or parents had reminded them of their study and worship schedules several times. On some occasions,

children seem to prioritize based on the rhythm of the game, for example postponing eating, studying, or helping parents until the game is completely over. Researchers also observed that when access to games was restricted, some children showed difficulty controlling their emotions, such as complaining, arguing, or continuing to negotiate in order to get more playing time. This pattern suggests that children's self-regulation skills have not been optimally developed because decision-making is based more on the impulse to obtain instant gratification than an awareness of obligations. These findings confirm that the crisis of parental authority not only has implications for the reduction of children's obedience to family rules, but also affects the formation of Islamic character that emphasizes the importance of discipline, responsibility, patience, and self-control as the main provisions in living social life.

Millennial Parents' Adaptive Strategies in Dealing with the Impact of Digital Games on Children's Islamic Character Education

The findings indicate that millennial parents apply a tiered strategy based on Islamic character education to deal with the authority crisis that arises due to the intensity of digital game use in children. The strategy begins with the stage of controlling the use of gadgets through limiting playing time, establishing rules for the use of digital devices, and providing children with an understanding of the positive and negative impacts of online games. However, research findings show that this stage is the most difficult phase because it often leads to rejection from children, such as tantrums, protests, anger, or ignoring the rules that have been made. This condition makes some parents realize that restrictions alone are not enough to overcome the problems that have formed due to excessive gaming habits. Therefore, they seek to rebuild emotional closeness with children through increasing the intensity of communication in daily life. Communication is usually done at times that are considered most possible, such as when eating together, before going to bed, after congregational prayers, or when parents accompany children's learning activities. In some families, mothers take a more dominant role in mentoring because they have more time with their children, while fathers play a role in strengthening rules and example when they are at home. After the relationship between parents and children begins to improve, the process of Islamic character education is carried out through the habit of worship, teaching adab in daily life, reading the Qur'an, and children's involvement in religious activities of the family and the surrounding environment. At the same time, parents do not always remove all access to technology or digital games, but rather direct the use of digital media to more educational and religious activities, such as watching Islamic content, stories of the prophets, religious learning videos, and educational applications that are appropriate for the child's age. Thus, the strategies implemented by millennial parents tend to be gradual and adaptive, starting from controlling the use of games, strengthening emotional relationships, habituating Islamic values, to the use of technology as a means of character education. This strategy shows that efforts to rebuild parental authority are more effective through a balance between rules, communication, example, and mentoring than through unilateral prohibitions.

The first strategy that millennial parents have to deal with in overcoming the crisis of authority due to the use of digital games is to rebuild control over the use of gadgets through a preventive, persuasive, and consistent approach. This effort is realized through limiting the duration of play, setting a schedule for using gadgets, preparing family rules, and providing children with an understanding of the benefits and risks of digital games on learning development, behavior, and character. Although it seems simple, this stage becomes the most complex phase because parents

have to deal with the habits of the child that have been formed through intensive interaction with the digital world. Most parents admit that children have made online games part of their daily routine as well as the main medium for interacting with peers, so any form of restriction is often perceived as a threat to their freedom. As a result, various forms of resistance appeared, ranging from crying, getting angry, arguing, ignoring the rules, to negotiating for extended playing time. This condition shows that the crisis of parental authority is not solely caused by the existence of digital games, but also influenced by the weak control formed from the beginning when the use of gadgets is given without clear limits. Interestingly, this study found that parents who were able to apply rules consistently with rational reasons were more likely to gain acceptance from their children than those who only relied on unilateral prohibitions. These findings indicate that controlling the use of gadgets is not enough through technical restrictions, but requires open communication, consistency of rules, and mutual agreement so that children understand that regulating the use of technology is part of the family's responsibility in maintaining a balance between digital activities, education, and the development of Islamic characters.

"In the past, my son was free to play cellphones until night because I think the important thing is that he stays at home. After I saw that the score dropped and it began to be difficult to be told to pray, I made a rule that I could only play after studying for a maximum of one hour. At first, he was angry, cranky, and even cried because he felt unfair compared to his friends. But my husband and I still explained quietly that this rule was made so that he still had time to study, study, and rest. Over time he began to understand. Now when the time is up, he himself hands over his cellphone without having to be reminded many times." (MIL7, interview, June 24, 2026).

The results of the observations reinforced the findings of the interview that the control of the use of gadgets took place through a negotiation process that did not always run smoothly. During field visits, researchers found that some families posted a schedule for using gadgets in the living room or near the child's study area as a reminder of playtime, study, study, and rest. In one family, the parents ask the child to put the mobile phone in the living room after the time limit for play, while in the other family, the digital device is kept by the father until all the child's obligations, such as doing schoolwork, reading the Qur'an, and performing prayers, have been completed. The researchers also observed that in the early stages of implementing the rules, the child repeatedly tried to request additional play time for various reasons, showing expressions of disappointment, and even occasionally slamming the door or choosing to remain silent when his request was rejected. However, when fathers and mothers show a consistent attitude and provide the same explanation of the reasons for the restriction, the intensity of the child's rejection gradually begins to decrease. The findings of this observation show that the success of the Digital Control Strategy is not primarily determined by strict or loose rules, but by the consistency of implementation, the unity of the attitude of both parents, and their ability to build educational communication.

The findings indicate that after the stage of controlling the use of gadgets began to run, most millennial parents realized that restrictions and rules alone were not enough to restore their authority in the family. Children who have long been accustomed to obtaining satisfaction, entertainment, and social interaction through digital games tend to keep their distance from their parents if emotional relationships are not improved. Therefore, the next strategy that develops naturally is to rebuild emotional closeness (Emotional Reconnection Strategy) through improving the quality of communication and togetherness in daily activities. Research has found that parents begin to provide special time to talk with their children when eating together, accompanying

studying, before going to bed, and after performing congregational prayers. These moments are used to listen to children's stories about school, friends, or gaming experiences without directly giving judgments or punishments. This approach makes children feel more appreciated so that communication takes place more openly than when parents only give prohibitions. In some families, mothers play the role of main companions who build daily communication because they have a higher intensity of meetings with children, while fathers take more roles as reinforcement, motivation, and role models when they are at home after work. The division of roles does not show the dominance of one party, but rather reflects collaboration in parenting aimed at rebuilding children's trust in parents. These findings show that parental authority in millennial families is more effectively built through the quality of emotional relationships rather than just the application of formal control, so that communication becomes the main bridge in restoring the function of the family as a space for Islamic character education.

"I used to see that when I came home from work, all I saw was that the child was still holding his cellphone or not. If I keep playing, I immediately get angry. Now I change my ways. After Maghrib we prayed in congregation, then I talked to him about school, his friends, and even asked him what game he was playing. From there, I knew what he was thinking. Surprisingly, after being talked to a lot, it was even easier for him to stop playing because he felt cared for, not constantly scolded." (MIL11, interview, June 28, 2026).

The results of observations showed that families who managed to rebuild emotional relationships had a much more intense interaction pattern than families who only relied on the rules of using gadgets. During the study process, researchers observed some parents intentionally create simple routines, such as eating dinner together without a cell phone, accompanying a child with homework, or having a casual conversation before the child goes to bed. On some occasions, fathers are seen engaging children in light activities, such as watering plants or buying household necessities, while mothers take advantage of cooking or learning time together to build more intimate conversations. Researchers also found that when communication takes place openly, children become more likely to tell about their experiences of playing games, conflicts with friends, and difficulties faced at school without having to be provoked with questioning questions. This situation shows that emotional closeness creates a sense of security so that children no longer make the digital world the only space to get attention and recognition. Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that the Emotional Reconnection Strategy functions as a bridge that reconnects the relationship between parents and children after previously experiencing distance due to the dominance of digital media. With the restoration of communication and trust, parents gain greater space to carry out educational functions, provide advice, and inculcate Islamic values more effectively through warm, dialogical, and exemplary interactions rather than through authoritarian approaches.

The findings indicate that after the emotional relationship between parents and children begins to be rebuilt, the next strategy is directed at strengthening Islamic character education through the process of internalizing religious values that is carried out gradually and continuously. In contrast to the previous approach which emphasized behavior control, this stage is more oriented towards the formation of moral awareness so that the child understands the reasons why a behavior is considered good or bad in an Islamic perspective. Parents no longer only remind their children to reduce their time playing games, but begin to get used to the implementation of congregational prayers, reading the Qur'an, teaching manners to parents and others, and involving children in various religious activities in the family and community. Interestingly, research has found that the

process of internalizing character becomes more effective when parents first set an example rather than just giving verbal advice. Children tend to follow habits that they see every day, such as parents who are disciplined in carrying out prayers on time, reading the Qur'an after Maghrib, limiting the use of gadgets when with family, and showing a polite attitude in daily life. At the same time, parents began to view technology no longer as a threat that must be kept away from their children, but as a medium that could be directed to support Islamic character education. Various Islamic content, stories of prophets, religious learning videos, Qur'an applications, and other educational media have begun to be introduced as alternatives to digital games. Thus, this study found that the restoration of parental authority does not stop at the success of controlling the use of gadgets or building emotional closeness, but reaches a more substantial stage when parents are able to transform technology into educational means that strengthen Islamic character and shape children's religious consciousness in a sustainable manner.

"Now I don't immediately prohibit children from holding cellphones. After he finished reciting or praying, I invited him to watch videos of the prophet's stories, learn tajweed through an application, or listen to children's lectures that had a short duration. Sometimes we watch together and then discuss the content of the video. I feel that this way is easier for children to accept than just telling or forbidding. Children also began to choose more useful spectacles because we accompanied them every time they used their cellphones." (MIL3, interview, June 29, 2026).

Observations showed that families that succeeded in internalizing Islamic character education had a more integrative mentoring pattern than families that only focused on restricting the use of games. During observation, researchers found that some parents routinely invited their children to perform congregational prayers at home and in mosques, read the Qur'an after the Maghrib prayer, and involve children in religious activities such as recitation, TPQ, and commemoration of Islamic holidays in the village environment. At the same time, the use of gadgets is not completely eliminated, but is directed to access Qur'anic learning applications, videos of the stories of the prophets, daily prayers, and Islamic educational materials that are appropriate for the child's age. Researchers also observed that children appeared more enthusiastic when parents accompanied the use of digital media than when they were learning on their own. The interaction gave rise to a discussion about the value of honesty, responsibility, discipline, and manners which were then associated with daily experiences and gaming activities. Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that the Islamic Character Reinforcement Strategy and the Transformative Digital Parenting Strategy are not two independent strategies, but complement each other in rebuilding parental authority in the digital era.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the crisis of parental authority in the formation of Islamic character in millennial families cannot be understood solely as a consequence of increasing engagement with digital games. Rather, it reflects a broader transformation of parenting structures occurring simultaneously with changes in the social ecosystem of the digital age. Reduced interaction between parents and children, occupational demands, social mobility, and growing dependence on digital devices can weaken the family's position as the primary site of socialization (Livingstone et al., 2017; Nichols & Selim, 2022). Under these conditions, digital games no longer function merely as entertainment; they can become alternative social spaces in which children encounter peer norms, competition, recognition, conflict resolution, and identity-related meanings (Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2015; Kahila et al., 2021; Vilasís-Pamos & Pires, 2022). The central result of the study is therefore

relational rather than technologically deterministic: digital games appear to intensify an authority crisis when parental presence, communication, and value transmission are already weakened. Equally important, the findings identify a restorative process consisting of four interrelated stages—Digital Control Strategy, Emotional Reconnection Strategy, Islamic Character Reinforcement Strategy, and Transformative Digital Parenting Strategy—through which parental authority can be gradually reconstructed. Contemporary digital-parenting research similarly emphasizes that parental mediation involves more than restriction and increasingly requires relational, instructional, and participatory strategies.

This interpretation is consistent with recent international evidence showing that family processes are closely associated with problematic digital behavior. Longitudinal research indicates that parental support and adverse parenting experiences can predict subsequent symptoms of Internet gaming disorder, suggesting that the family environment is not merely a consequence of gaming problems but may also constitute an antecedent condition (She et al., 2022). Similarly, Hwang et al. (2020) identified meaningful associations between family relationships and reward-related functioning among adolescents with Internet gaming disorder, whereas Nielsen et al. (2021) found that family-based therapy reduced problematic gaming and that relational improvement may contribute to treatment success. Research on parental phubbing further strengthens the relational interpretation: parental digital distraction has been associated longitudinally with adolescents' problematic smartphone use (Geng et al., 2021), depressive symptoms through disrupted parent-adolescent communication (Wang et al., 2022), lower psychological-needs satisfaction and self-esteem (Xiao & Zheng, 2022), and peer alienation through perceived parental rejection (Wu et al., 2022). These studies do not prove the causal sequence proposed in the present study, but they support its core proposition that weakened relational availability can make digital environments more consequential in children's psychosocial lives.

The findings also extend global research by treating gaming as a social-learning environment rather than only a behavioral risk. Children's gaming frequently includes metagame practices such as strategizing, discussing, information seeking, producing content, and sharing experiences with others (Kahila et al., 2021). Gaming identities can also become embedded in broader cultural imaginaries and aspirations (Vilasís-Pamos & Pires, 2022), while IT identity, maladaptive cognitions, and maladaptive emotions have been linked to problematic online gaming (Gong et al., 2020). From the perspective of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, these environments provide observable models, rapid feedback, repeated reinforcement, and socially valued rewards. Consequently, the models available to children are no longer dominated by parents; they are distributed across parents, peers, streamers, gaming communities, and platform systems. This helps explain the gradual shift of authority from interpersonal family relationships toward digitally mediated relationships when the latter provide more immediate, interactive, and continuous reinforcement. Research on children's metagaming and adolescent gamer identity supports the interpretation of gaming as a broader social and identity-related ecology rather than an isolated screen activity.

Nevertheless, the present findings should not be read as evidence that digital exposure is inherently harmful. This qualification is important because recent international evidence challenges technologically deterministic interpretations of adolescent digital behavior. Major reviews conclude that average associations between digital technology use and adolescent well-being are generally small, heterogeneous, or inconsistent (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Orben, 2020;

Valkenburg et al., 2022), while person-specific analyses demonstrate that the same digital activity may relate positively, negatively, or negligibly to well-being across different adolescents (Beyens et al., 2020). Thus, the relevant question is not simply *how much* children play but *how, why, with whom*, and within what relational environment gaming occurs. This broader evidence strengthens the present study's argument that digital technology is better conceptualized as a catalyst operating within a relational ecosystem than as the sole cause of the parenting crisis.

The findings therefore expand earlier parental-mediation research that emphasized parents' digital competence, regulatory strategies, and management of children's media use (Livingstone et al., 2017; Nikken & Oprea, 2018; Nichols & Selim, 2022). The present study suggests that control over screen time or gaming access is only an entry point. Restriction may create space for change, but sustainable character formation requires emotional reconnection, consistent moral modeling, dialogue about values, and the transformation of technology into a guided educational resource. This proposition is consistent with Scott's (2022) demonstration that family mediation includes positive and instructional practices extending beyond restrictive control. In this sense, effective digital parenting is not primarily determined by parents' technical superiority over their children; it depends on whether parents remain credible, emotionally available, and morally consistent models whose guidance can compete with the immediacy of digital reinforcement.

The Indonesian context adds a culturally specific dimension to this argument. Harianti and Kurniawan (2022) found that parental phubbing in Indonesia was associated with differences in several dimensions of young people's mental well-being, indicating that digitally displaced parental attention is also relevant in the local context. At the same time, Indonesian Islamic-education research demonstrates that digital technology can be redirected toward constructive identity and value formation. Digital storytelling has been reported to strengthen engagement and Islamic identity formation in religious education (Inayah et al., 2026), while the internalization of Islamic digital ethics has been associated with students' moral formation (Putri et al., 2026). Related research emphasizes the integration of technology with humanistic Islamic values (Hanifah et al., 2026), the use of Islamic podcasts to support engagement in Islamic Religious Education (Ramli et al., 2026), and the need for digital literacy and Islamic character education as social media shapes students' lifestyles and digital identities (Khofifah, 2026). These local studies converge with the present findings in rejecting a simple prohibition-oriented response to technology. However, most focus on schools, Islamic educational institutions, or student media practices, whereas the present study foregrounds the family as a moral-socialization system and explains how parental authority may be restored through a sequential relational process. This family-centered emphasis therefore constitutes an important contextual extension of Indonesian digital-Islamic education scholarship.

Theoretically, pedagogically, and in policy terms, these findings imply a shift from a control-centered model toward relational and value-based digital socialization. Theoretically, Social Learning Theory can be refined for digitally saturated families by conceptualizing modeling and reinforcement as distributed across offline and online agents, while parental authority is understood less as unilateral control and more as relational credibility sustained through emotional connection, consistency, and meaningful participation. Pedagogically, schools and Islamic educational institutions can support families through parent-child digital-literacy workshops, guided co-play or co-viewing, reflective discussion of gaming narratives and reward systems, digital etiquette, source evaluation, online conflict management, and activities that connect digital experiences to Islamic

virtues such as responsibility, self-regulation, honesty, respect, and empathy. Such programs may also support student engagement, emotional well-being, media literacy, responsible online behavior, and healthier digital identity formation, although these outcomes require direct evaluation rather than assumption. At the policy level, the findings favor family digital-well-being initiatives, age-appropriate platform safeguards, accessible parental guidance, school counseling, and referral pathways for cases in which gaming disrupts sleep, learning, relationships, or daily functioning rather than blanket bans based solely on screen duration. Because the present study did not clinically assess mental-health disorders or experimentally evaluate social-media regulation, however, its findings should inform preventive education and relational support rather than be used as direct evidence for psychiatric intervention or restrictive platform policy. This caution is consistent with evidence showing considerable individual heterogeneity in the relationship between digital media and adolescent well-being.

The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing the crisis and restoration of parental authority as two sides of the same relational process. Rather than treating digital games as an autonomous cause of Islamic character decline, the study identifies technology as an accelerator whose influence increases when family communication, emotional presence, and value modeling weaken. Its principal contribution is the four-stage model—Digital Control Strategy → Emotional Reconnection Strategy → Islamic Character Reinforcement Strategy → Transformative Digital Parenting Strategy—which integrates regulative, affective, spiritual, and digital dimensions. The model proposes that authority restoration does not occur linearly through prohibition; instead, it emerges through reconstructing the parent–child relationship and subsequently repositioning technology from a competing socialization agent into a supervised medium for moral learning. This mechanism differentiates the present study from conventional parental-mediation approaches centered principally on restriction and monitoring and offers a culturally grounded extension of digital-parenting scholarship for Muslim families. It also provides an empirically testable framework for investigating whether relational recovery mediates the transition from digital regulation to Islamic character internalization.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The study is situated within a particular socio-cultural context, and its proposed four-stage sequence should therefore be understood as an analytically derived model rather than a universally established causal pathway. Interpretation may also be affected by participants' retrospective accounts, social-desirability pressures surrounding Islamic parenting, and the difficulty of separating the influence of gaming from broader smartphone, social-media, peer, school, and socioeconomic environments. Moreover, the analysis does not establish that weakening parental authority temporally precedes intensive gaming unless this ordering is subsequently confirmed through longitudinal evidence. Future research should therefore test the model longitudinally across diverse Muslim family settings; collect paired data from parents and children; combine interviews with observation, digital-use logs, or ecological momentary assessment; and examine whether age, gender, socioeconomic status, parental digital competence, gaming genre, and intensity of online interaction alter the process. Intervention studies should also compare the four-stage model with restriction-only approaches and evaluate behavioral, relational, Islamic-character, media-literacy, digital-identity, and mental-health outcomes over time. Such work would determine whether the proposed stages constitute a reproducible mechanism of parental-authority restoration rather than a context-specific explanatory model.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the crisis of parental authority in Islamic character education among millennial families is not caused by digital games alone. Rather, it emerges through a gradual digital authority shift in which limited parental accompaniment, weak supervision, children's intensive engagement with gaming communities, and limited parental digital literacy reduce the family's influence as the primary source of values and behavioral guidance. The consequences reported by parents and observed in family life include weaker discipline in religious practice, less respectful communication with parents, and reduced self-control and responsibility. Importantly, the findings also show that parental authority can be reconstructed. The most adaptive strategies combined negotiated limits on device use, stronger parent-child emotional relationships, consistent Islamic habituation, and selective use of digital media as an educational resource. These findings position parental authority as relational, communicative, and adaptive rather than purely controlling.

The study is limited by its single-site qualitative design, small purposive sample, and reliance on parents' accounts and short-term observations; the perspectives of children, teachers, and other community members were not examined systematically. The findings therefore support analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future studies should include multi-site samples, incorporate children's perspectives, examine fathers' and mothers' mediation practices comparatively, and evaluate family-based digital-literacy or character-education interventions over time. Such work could test and refine the proposed digital authority shift model across different social, religious, and technological contexts.

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