

The Role of the Family in Shaping Digital Citizenship: A Sociological Reading of the Functional Transformation of Socialization

دور الأسرة في تشكيل المواطنة الرقمية: قراءة سوسيولوجية للتحويل الوظيفي للتنشئة الاجتماعية

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Abstract:

This theoretical article aims to analyze the functional and structural changes that have occurred in the role of the family within this new context. It also discusses the mechanisms through which the family can effectively contribute to shaping the responsible digital citizen, based on a theoretical framework derived from contemporary sociology of the family. The significance of this article lies in expanding the theoretical framework of family sociology, analyzing the erosion of parental cognitive authority, and offering an analytical Framework that Can be utilized in developing effective family guidance programs

Keywords: Family, Digital Socialization, Digital Society, Digital Citizenship Functional Transformation

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An introduction:

The function of socialization has witnessed a radical transformation with the emergence of the digital society, where the family is no longer the sole source of neither information nor the exclusive cognitive environment. Modern socialization now requires preparing the individual for participation in a society that transcends geographical boundaries, leading to the rise of the concept of "Digital Citizenship." This form of citizenship is not merely about possessing technical skills; rather, it encompasses a set of ethical standards, legal responsibilities, and social practices necessary for positive and safe interaction online.

Therefore, this theoretical article aims to analyze the functional and structural changes that have occurred in the role of the family within this new context, and discuss the mechanisms through which the family can effectively contribute to shaping the responsible digital citizen, based on a theoretical framework derived from contemporary sociology of the family.

The significance of this article lies in expanding the theoretical framework of family sociology by integrating concepts of the digital age (such as digital citizenship) into socialization theories. On the one hand, it analyzes the weakening and erosion of parental cognitive authority in light of the technical superiority of the children. On the other hand, regarding its applied or social importance, it offers an analytical framework that aids in developing family guidance programs. These programs enhance parents' ability to instill the ethical and critical skills necessary for a positive and safe existence in the digital space.

I. Analysis of the Concept of Digital Citizenship:

Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly the Internet revolution, has contributed to global changes that, in turn, have produced new and complex concepts. Alongside terms such as "digital space" and "digital identity," "digital citizenship" stands out as one of the most important emerging concepts demanding analysis.

Therefore, we have dedicated this study to thoroughly understanding and analyzing the dimensions of this pivotal concept. As a first step, we proceeded to deconstruct the two constituent concepts to establish the scientific meaning of each one individually before commencing the analysis of the compound concept that brings both meanings together.

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1- The Concept of Citizenship :

Linguistically, the origin and meaning of the word "citizenship" trace back to the era of ancient Greek civilization. The term originated from (*polis*), which meant the city, considering it a legal structure and participation in the city's affairs. The word "Mouwatanah" is also used as a translation for the French word (*Citoyenneté*), which is derived from (*City*). In the English language, it is corresponded by the word (*Citizenship*), which is derived from the word (*City*) (Mihran, (2012), p. 62).

Regarding its sociological connotation, the concept of citizenship refers to the relationship between the individual and the state, as defined by that state's law, including the corresponding duties and rights. It further asserts that the concept denotes a degree of freedom and concludes by generally referring to the political rights it bestows, such as the right to vote and the right to hold public office (Sonia, (2008), p 6).

Furthermore, it refers to a system of fundamental rights, the most important of which are the right to life, equality, private property, education, healthcare, work, and social security, as well as the freedom of thought and belief. Additionally, it encompasses voting, parliamentary representation, the formation of unions and associations, justice, information circulation, and movement (Lynn, (2002), p 225).

2- Digitization :

It is the process of converting analog materials into an electronic, digital, format, primarily for storage and use in a computer. (Senouci, (2022), p10).

It means the process of converting information or data from its analog (traditional) form into a digital (binary) format that can be processed and stored by a computer.

3- Digital Citizenship:

Digital citizenship aims to establish the optimal methods, ways, and systems for guiding and protecting all technology users. Specifically, it involves defining the correct and incorrect practices in dealing with modern technology to form a protective barrier for all individuals. Accordingly, digital citizenship refers to a blend of technical, social, and intellectual skills that enable an individual to successfully interpret technology and communication skills, and to use them safely in the information age to maximize practical, social, and spiritual benefit, thereby

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maximizing the success opportunities for both the individual and their state and society (Saady, (2021), p 2).

It also represents the set of rules, controls, standards, norms, ideas, and principles followed in the optimal use of technology. These are needed by citizens, both young and old, in order to contribute to the advancement of the nation. Therefore, it serves as guidance towards the benefits of modern technologies and protection from their dangers (Fabienne, (2014), p 125).

II. The Functional Transformation of the Family's Role in Digital Socialization

The family unit has undergone profound transformations in recent decades, driven by the Digital Revolution, which has not only altered communication and interaction methods among its members but has fundamentally reshaped its primary functions of socialization, control, and guidance. Consequently, the family now operates within a dual space: a traditional physical space (for direct, daily interactions) and a parallel digital space characterized by virtual relationships mediated through electronic platforms.

This new reality compels the family to redefine its fundamental roles and functions, as outlined by most sociologists, such as Parsons and Durkheim, including the educational function (focused on socialization), the economic function, the affective/psychological function, and the cultural/normative function. Most of these traditional functions have witnessed a change in their features and operational mechanism.

For instance, the socialization function, which historically relied on direct interaction and the transmission of traditional values within a confined, limited scope, is now challenged. Today, children are exposed to multiple digital influences (platforms, influencers, social networks), generating a powerful, informal competitor to the family in the process of socialization. This situation necessitates a new role for the family, manifested in Conscious Digital Socialization. This involves equipping children with the ability to distinguish between beneficial and harmful content, and establishing digital ethical values that are consistent with accepted social norms.

When discussing Social Control as a core function delegated to the family, a radical shift is observed. While control in the past centered around direct parental supervision and social sanctions within the family's physical boundaries, this institution's ability to exert direct family control has diminished today. This is primarily due to the increasing autonomy of children in using digital devices and platforms. Consequently, the family's role has changed from a deterrent authority to

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a digital guide and mentor, where effective regulation now relies fundamentally on preventative education and children's digital self-awareness, rather than on traditional coercive monitoring.

Furthermore, from a communicative perspective, the family's function has transformed from a space for face-to-face affective communication to a parallel digital space. Communication applications (such as What Sapp, Snap chat, and others) have become new mediums for regulating familial relationships. Although this shift may occasionally lead to a decline in direct emotional connection, it offers, in contrast, the continuity of contact across temporal and spatial boundaries. In this new context, a vital dimension of Digital Citizenship emerges within the family, manifesting in the necessity of respecting digital privacy, dedicating efforts to the ethical use of technology, and encouraging conscious participation among family members.

Regarding the Cultural and Normative Function of the family, a radical change has been observed. While the family previously represented the primary and sole source for the transmission of local culture and religious values, it is now being challenged in this role by digital platforms that, in turn, transmit hybrid global cultures. This cultural pluralism has led to the emergence of a generational value gap and a challenge to identity formation. Consequently, the family's new function has shifted towards building digital critical awareness among children. The objective is to empower them to engage in selective and conscious interaction with global digital culture, thereby ensuring the preservation of their authentic identity without becoming isolated from cultural developments.

The Digital Economy has had a direct impact on the reshaping of the family's economic functions through new patterns such as e-commerce, remote work, and digital education. Driven by these practices, the family has effectively transformed into a digital economic unit that consumes, produces, and learns within the boundaries of the cyber space. This transformation necessitates the reinforcement of the economic dimension of Digital Citizenship among its members by raising the level of awareness of rights, ensuring financial security, and establishing responsibility and ethics in all electronic transactions and interactions.

III. Theoretical Frameworks Explaining the Functional Transformation of the Family's Role in Digital Socialization

1. The Neo-Structural-Functionalist Theory

The Neo-Functionalist Theory posits that society is a dynamic, changing system, and that social institution, including the family, redefine their functions in accordance with structural transformations (Parsons, T. (1951))

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In the digital context, the family has shifted from merely being a passive transmitter of knowledge to becoming an active guiding agent that balances interaction with technology and the preservation of social values. Durkheim (1964) suggested that social institutions continuously adapt to social changes in order to maintain societal stability. This principle explains the current redistribution of the family's functions in the digital era.

2. Actor–Network Theory (ANT):

This theory asserts that technology is not merely a collection of tools, but rather social actors that participate with humans in shaping social reality (Latour, (2005), p. 72). Accordingly, the family's role in digital socialization can be understood as a continuous process of negotiation between human actors and digital devices. The family no longer exercises complete control over the transmission of knowledge, but rather works to manage the interaction with the digital space through critical awareness.

3. The Theory of Cultural and Digital Capital

Bourdieu (1986) explains the concept of Cultural Capital as the aggregate of skills, knowledge, and values that grant individuals a distinguished position in society.

With the advent of the digital transformation, Digital Capital emerged, encompassing technical and cognitive competencies. According to Ragnedda & Ruiu (2020), the family's ability to fulfill its guiding and critical role in digital socialization is determined by the extent to which it possesses sufficient Digital Capital. Families with high digital capital are capable of empowering their children to exercise conscious Digital Citizenship, while families with weak capital may face difficulties in performing this role, consequently leading to digital gaps (or divides).

4. Symbolic Interactionism Theory:

This theory emphasizes that meanings and values are formed through **Social interaction** (Blumer, (1969)).

In the digital sphere, interaction has expanded to include virtual elements, compelling the family to engage in **negotiated socialization**. Here, children participate in formulating the meaning of technology use, instead of the process being a unidirectional transmission of knowledge.

5. Media-Digital Socialization Theory:

According to Livingstone (2018), the family no longer limits itself to traditional media monitoring; instead, it has become a cultural mediator that helps children understand digital content and consciously engage with it.

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Abu Ghazaleh (2021) suggests that the family performs a dual role: digitally protecting children and media educating them. This dual function enhances their ability to interact positively with the digital environment and practice responsible Digital Citizenship.

IV. Proposed Mechanisms for Developing Digital Citizenship in Children through the Family

1. Mechanisms of Digital Socialization within the Family:

Modern educational studies indicate that effective digital socialization begins with the presence of a flexible system of control and regulation that guides children's use of technology without excess or repression. The family that establishes clear rules regarding screen time, application types, and bedtimes contributes to training the child in self-management and future behavioral control. Livingstone & Helsper (2008) confirm that the existence of balanced rules governing digital media use is directly linked to an increase in children's digital safety skills. Furthermore, Clark (2011) explains that flexible regulation is more effective than rigid regulation, as it fosters self-discipline rather than external submission.

Digital awareness and education are the fundamental pillars of modern digital socialization. Children require knowledge on how to protect their privacy, verify information, understand the risks of cyber bullying, and avoid falling into fraud traps. Ribble (2015) illustrates that digital awareness is considered the first line of defense that safeguards children from digital risks, as it equips them with what is termed "Digital Behavioral Immunity." Jones & Mitchell (2016) further add that open dialogue concerning Internet risks significantly contributes to reducing children's exposure to cyber bullying, as it prepares them to anticipate and consciously deal with danger.

Open family dialogue is no less important than regulation or awareness. Continuous communication about digital experiences and listening to children's challenges without immediate judgment grants the child the confidence to turn to their family when facing any concerning digital situation. Padilla-Walker (2020) indicates that families relying on dialogue instead of strict monitoring create a healthy digital environment where risky behaviors decrease and the constructive use of technology increases.

Furthermore, Digital Role Modeling is among the most crucial mechanisms. Social Learning Theory has demonstrated that children acquire behavior more through observation than direct instruction. Therefore, Bandura (2001) asserts that parental behavior forms the fundamental model upon which children's social and digital behavior is constructed. When parents adhere to balanced digital conduct—

such as respecting privacy, avoiding the spread of rumors, and limiting phone use during family gatherings—they instill responsible digital behavior in their children.

Family digital engagement is considered an effective mechanism for fostering a positive relationship between the family and technology, as shared play, learning through applications, or watching educational content helps reduce the generational digital gap. Takeuchi (2011) suggests that digital engagement strengthens a "shared digital culture" within the family, making technology a medium for interaction and cohesion rather than isolation.

Furthermore, empowering digital skills raises the readiness level of children for the modern digital world. Teaching children programming, computational thinking, research skills, or content creation helps transform them from passive consumers into active participants. Ito et al. (2013) indicate that family support for creative digital skills contributes to building an independent digital personality capable of innovation and critical thinking.

Building Digital Citizenship requires a balanced awareness of rights and responsibilities, which should be the focus of the family's digital education efforts. Ribble (2015) indicates that Digital Citizenship encompasses multiple concepts such as respecting privacy, data protection, ethical communication, and responsibility when publishing content. Therefore, educating children about these values helps them practice responsible and informed digital behavior.

Digital ethics constitute a pivotal component of Digital Citizenship. Children need to understand the importance of avoiding cyber bullying, refraining from sharing fake news, respecting differences, and considering the impact of their digital words on others. Wright (2017) confirms that reinforcing digital ethics within the family is an effective strategy for mitigating negative online behaviors, particularly among adolescents who frequently interact on digital platforms.

The family also needs to educate children on how to securely manage their digital identity, including selecting strong passwords, activating privacy settings, and defining the appropriate audience for published content. Boyd (2014) explains that children's understanding of their digital identity contributes to reducing their exposure to risks such as hacking, tracking, or cyber-harassment.

Furthermore, building Digital Citizenship involves training children in digital conflict resolution, such as reporting abusive content, ignoring provocations, or seeking assistance when necessary. Hinduja & Patchin (2015) indicate that children

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who possess digital conflict management skills are less likely to engage in cyber bullying.

Additionally, involving children in purposeful digital activities—such as digital volunteering, producing educational content, or participating in electronic environmental initiatives—contributes to fostering a spirit of responsibility and belonging. Jenkins (2009) suggests that positive engagement in the digital sphere enhances "participatory citizenship," which grants children a sense of being part of a larger digital community.

Ultimately, the family can adopt a Digital Family Agreement that clearly defines rules for usage, values for digital respect, and strategies for dealing with risks. Coyne et al. (2021) indicate that digital family agreements help reduce conflicts and increase the clarity of expectations between parents and children. Coupled with periodic family meetings to review digital conduct, children become better prepared to exercise conscious and responsible Digital Citizenship.

- Conclusion:

It is evident from the sociological analysis of the family's role in shaping Digital Citizenship among children that the family has today become a pivotal social institution in qualifying the new generation for conscious integration into the digital society. With the accelerating transformations imposed by technology, the family's contribution is no longer limited to traditional socialization; rather, it now encompasses the construction of digital and ethical capital that enables children to practice their roles as active digital citizens. The literature has demonstrated that the family's ability to integrate flexible monitoring with value education and open dialogue is a crucial factor in imparting skills such as critical thinking, managing their digital identity, and adhering to responsible communication rules. These skills constitute a modern extension of the concept of citizenship in contemporary society.

From a sociological perspective, Digital Citizenship is not merely a set of technical skills; rather, it is the product of a complex interaction among social and cultural factors within the family, including the pattern of family relationships, the level of cultural capital, and the parents' philosophy toward technology. In this context, studies indicate that families adopting a model of participatory socialization and working to build a shared digital culture contribute to producing a generation capable of conscious engagement with the digital public sphere, thereby promoting values of respect, accountability, participation, and responsible selfhood.

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Thus, it can be asserted that the family—as the primary cell in social organization—plays a strategic role in reshaping citizenship in the age of digitization. It is not merely a place for building protection against digital risks, but rather a space for reproducing norms and values that govern behavior within the digital sphere. Consequently, investing in supporting the family cognitively, educationally, and technically constitutes a societal necessity for preparing digital citizens capable of making a positive contribution to comprehensive digital development. The need remains pressing for further sociological studies that explore the differences among families and the impact of cultural, social, and economic structures on the formation of Digital Citizenship, thereby enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms of digital socialization in its manifold contexts.

-Practical suggestions:

The study recommends enhancing digital literacy among parents so that they can effectively guide their children within the digital environment, while adopting a parenting approach based on dialogue and participation rather than strict supervision, which strengthens children's trust and commitment. It also emphasizes integrating ethical values into digital upbringing, such as respecting privacy and avoiding cyber bullying, and establishing clear family rules regulating device and internet use. The recommendations highlight the importance of encouraging children to engage in positive digital production and family participation in certain digital activities, as this helps reduce the generational digital gap. Furthermore, children's critical thinking skills should be developed to enable them to evaluate online content effectively, alongside training them to manage digital conflicts safely and responsibly, thereby supporting the development of conscious and balanced digital citizenship.

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