The Role of the Church in Teaching Effective Parenting Methods to Protect the Alpha Generation from the Dangers of Gadget Addiction

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Church; Parenting; Alpha Generation; Gadget Addiction; Parenting Methods	This research explores the church's role in supporting parents of Generation Alpha and implementing effective parenting methods to prevent gadget addiction. This research collected and analyzed secondary data from relevant scientific journals, books, and news articles through a literature study approach. The results show that churches are important in providing education and resources for parents to face parenting challenges in the digital age. The research suggests that the integration of spiritual values and faith-based parenting guidelines can help parents in guiding their children to face the risks of device addiction. Furthermore, the study identified the need for educational programs specifically designed to equip parents with practical strategies in regulating their children's use of technology. The results of this study contribute to the understanding of the importance of synergy between church and family in educating children in the digital age.

Introduction

In an era of rapidly evolving technology, the rise of Generation Alpha marks a new chapter in human evolution. Their birth, which began in 2011, coincided with the burgeoning digital age, positioning them as the first generation to be born into a world where digital sophistication is not an invention but the norm. Their experience with technology from an early age shapes a new landscape of social interaction, learning and personal growth. However, these advancements also bring unique challenges, particularly the risk of device addiction, which raises questions about its impact on their development.

Generation Alpha, the children of the Millennial Generation, grew up amidst unprecedented technological advancements. They were living witnesses to the launch of the first iPad and the dominance of social media that changed the way we communicate. Research from McCrindle and Fell (2020) describes Generation Alpha as a highly connected generation. Their unique ability to navigate

the digital world early on promises to significantly change the way we work, learn and interact in the future.

Meanwhile, scientific literature highlights the potential and risks of their growth in the digital age. Apaydin and Kaya (2020) recognized the Alpha Generation's ability to solve problems by utilizing technology, pointing to adaptation and innovation as their key characteristics. However, research also reveals the flip side of the technology aspect. Apsari et al. (2023) highlighted device addiction as a serious problem faced by Generation Alpha, pointing out the negative impact on social interaction and emotional development.

The issue of device addiction is further deepened by research that suggests increased dependence on digital devices can lead to adverse health consequences. Panuntun et al. (2019) linked long-term device use to the risk of obesity and eye health disorders, while Fadlurrohim et al. (2019) added impacts on mental health, including loneliness and social isolation. This suggests an urgent need to balance the benefits of technology with its potential harms.

In the face of these challenges, a balanced and thoughtful approach is needed. Mellyan (2021) argues that early intervention and proper education can mitigate the risk of screen addiction and help Generation Alpha develop healthy social skills. This includes limiting screen time, encouraging face-to-face interactions, and introducing children to physical and creative activities that enrich their experiences outside of the digital world.

Furthermore, education and skills development must take into account the uniqueness of this generation. Ziatdinov and Cilliers (2021) suggest an educational approach that combines technology with innovative and interactive teaching methods, preparing Generation Alpha for the future they will shape. This includes education to train hard skills, as well as the development of soft skills such as teamwork, empathy and creativity.

The education of parents and teachers is also key in navigating these challenges. With a better understanding of the digital world and its impact, they can guide Generation Alpha through their childhood and adolescence more effectively, ensuring that they not only succeed academically but also grow into individuals who have a balanced and happy social life.

In the face of the complexity of challenges faced by Generation Alpha, this study aims to investigate the role of the church in providing and facilitating effective parenting approaches. Specifically, this research will explore how churches can assist parents in addressing the growing problem of device addiction among Generation Alpha. The research will identify strategies that have been and could be implemented by churches to support parents. These strategies include the development of value-oriented and moral education programs, the provision of practical parenting resources, and community initiatives that can strengthen the relationship between parents and children in the use of technology. Hopefully, the findings from this study can provide new insights into innovative ways churches can educate and support parents and their children, as well as contribute to the existing literature on the role of churches in the digital age.

Based on the above, this study aims to propose a framework for churches to raise parenting awareness and skills in the age of technology, with the ultimate goal of protecting Generation Alpha from the potential dangers of device addiction.

Materials and Methods

This research aims to examine the role of the church in providing and encouraging effective parenting methods for parents in protecting Generation Alpha from the risks and dangers of gadget addiction. In achieving this objective, the research adopts a literature review approach, utilizing various secondary data sources that include scholarly journals, books, and news articles. This literature review is centered on collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant information from these sources to understand the church's contribution in the context of parenting and preventing gadget addiction among Generation Alpha.

Data sources for this study were selected based on their relevance and credibility to the research topic. Inclusion criteria included: Scientific journals and peer-reviewed research studies, focusing on the effects of technology and gadgets on children, effective parenting methods, and the role of the church in child and family education. Books, which became the researcher's references, written by experts in the fields of child psychology, educational technology, and theology that discuss parenting, the impact of technology on child development, and guidance from a Christian perspective on educating children. News articles, which are additional references for researchers, come from trusted sources that review the latest trends in gadget addiction among children, as well as reportage on church initiatives and programs in supporting families and parents.

Data were collected through systematic searches using relevant keywords and phrases in various academic databases and online search engines. Keywords included "parenting and technology", "device addiction in Generation Alpha", "the role of the church in child education", and "Christian parenting methods". After the initial collection, the reference sources were reviewed to ensure conformity with the inclusion criteria and the research topic.

The data collected was then analyzed using the content analysis method, with the aim of identifying key themes, patterns, and insights that emerged from the literature. This analysis enabled the researcher to understand how the church can contribute to guiding Alpha Generation parents in overcoming parenting challenges related to device use.

Findings from the literature analysis were synthesized to develop an understanding of strategies and recommendations for churches in supporting parents. These include the establishment of Christian-based parenting guidelines, educational programs for parents, and community initiatives designed to strengthen families in facing the challenges of device addiction.

Through a literature review approach, this research aims to make theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of the role of the church in educating and supporting Alpha Generation parents. The research findings are expected to provide insights for churches (including church leaders and congregations) and parents in formulating effective approaches in protecting children from the dangers of gadget addiction.

Results and Discussions

Generation Alpha

Humans living today can be categorized into at least five generations. The generations consist of Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964; this generation has a good ability to adapt), Generation X (1965 to 1980; this generation was born during the early days of computers and the internet, they have a tendency to be independent in thinking), Generation Y (1981 to 1994; This generation uses communication technologies such as email and social media to interact with others),

Generation Z (1995 to 2010; this generation is able to do several activities at one time by utilizing technology), and Generation Alpha (2011 to present; this generation is the generation most familiar with the development of digital technology compared to previous generations) (Swandhina & Maulana, 2022).

Research on Generation Alpha is particularly important because this generation represents the future of the world. More than 2.8 million children, who are part of Generation Alpha, are born every week around the world. Their number is expected to reach around 2.2 billion by 2025 and will be the largest generation in world history. This growth will make India, China and Indonesia the most populous countries in the world in the future (Mccrindle & Fell, 2020).

Generation Alpha, which generally has parents from Generation Y or the Millennial Generation, was born after the first generation of iPad devices and Instagram apps were launched in 2010. The rapid development of technology experienced by Generation Alpha allows them to have easy access to information, making them a smart generation who can learn quickly from various online sources from an early age. The positive competencies and characters that stand out from Generation Alpha are their excellent digital literacy (since birth, they have been exposed to digital devices, such as smartphones and the like, which have had a significant impact on their growth), as well as their high curiosity. In the future, there will be many job opportunities in the technology industry for Generation Alpha, such as jobs in robotics, software development such as apps and social media, analytics using big data, etc.; at the same time, there will be challenges along with the development of technology, so it is important for Generation Alpha to equip themselves well continuously to stay relevant to the current situation (Ibid).

In addition to what has been discussed previously, Generation Alpha also has several other characteristics (Apaydin & Kaya, 2020). Another positive characteristic is that this generation is able to overcome various problems by utilizing technology to find alternative solutions to a problem. In addition, Generation Alpha has some negative characteristics, including that this generation is difficult to obey rules, tends to be selfish, and reluctant to share with others because they are generally spoiled by their parents. Generation Alpha intensively uses social media to interact with others. On the one hand, this is positive as it allows them to reach out to many people and thus build a wide network of friends; however, the unfortunate thing is that they are not wise enough in using social media. For example, they freely show off whatever they can show to get recognition from others, so without realizing it, they do not maintain their privacy properly. This makes them vulnerable to crimes such as online fraud. Another negative characteristic is that this generation does not consider the importance of religion in guiding their lives.

By knowing and understanding the characteristics of Generation Alpha, parents and teachers at school can guide them to become better individuals, not only in terms of hard skills, but also in terms of soft skills (Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2021). In terms of hard skills, Generation Alpha can be directed to not only be able to gather information online quickly, but also be able to interpret the various information they get. In terms of soft skills, Generation Alpha can be taught to get used to sharing with others and given the understanding that the information they get online is the result of other people's willingness to share. Basic character traits (such as discipline, responsibility, and self-confidence) and Christian values (including self-identity) need to be instilled in Generation Alpha from an early age. Teaching hard and soft skills can be done by utilizing technology and using methods that are relevant to Generation Alpha.

The dangers of device addiction

Generation Alpha was born when the world began to experience the Industrial Revolution 4.0. Previously, there had been three industrial revolutions, namely the first (starting in 1784) when the steam engine was invented and became a substitute for human or animal power in the process of producing a good or transportation, the second (occurring in the late 19th century) when electricity replaced steam power and electric-powered machines were used for mass production processes, and the third (starting in 1970) when computer technology began to be used to automate some production processes. Technological developments then continued with the start of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 in 2011 which was synonymous with the development of artificial intelligence (Suherman et al., 2020). Artificial intelligence can be accessed through various applications on various types of devices (such as smartphones, iPads, laptops, etc.) using an internet connection.

The applications available on today's devices help humans, especially Generation Alpha, in many aspects of life, such as communication (through various social media applications), education (through online meeting or video call applications to follow the teaching of school teachers via online classes, search engine applications such as Google that help them in doing school assignments, and other educational applications such as tutoring applications that provide them with additional training online related to things that have or have not been taught by teachers at school), entertainment (through online game applications as well as applications to watch movies or videos and listen to music online), and other aspects. The many benefits that Generation Alpha gets from devices, makes them use devices every day for a long period of time. This can cause them to become dependent (addicted) to devices (Apsari et al., 2023). The dangers of device addiction that threaten Generation Alpha will be discussed in the next paragraph.

The first danger of gadget addiction is the danger related to physical health. Prolonged use of gadgets can make children lazy to move, which can cause children to become obese. Children who look at the screen for too long will also suffer from eye health problems. Another physical danger is that the brain waves that are constantly exposed to gadgets can make children have alpha and beta brain waves that are far from the normal range (this kind of brain wave resembles brain waves owned by people with Alzheimer's). This will have a negative impact on the child's life as an adult, especially in terms of making decisions and thinking creatively. For information, a normal beta wave condition will make it easier for a person to analyze information and make decisions from that information. Meanwhile, normal alpha wave conditions will encourage a person to be able to think creatively and feel relaxed, fresh and healthy (Panuntun et al., 2019).

The next danger of device addiction is the danger related to character and mental health. The convenience provided by apps available on gadgets makes Generation Alpha accustomed to fast-paced or instant processes, making it difficult for them to appreciate a process in their lives. This can lead to frustration and depression when they don't get what they want. Generation Alpha's dependence on gadgets also makes them tend to live individualistically because they feel that the gadgets they have can accompany their daily lives and fulfill their needs, especially the need for entertainment. This causes them to be less able to interact or communicate well directly with others. Over time, they become socially alienated and eventually feel lonely (Fadlurrohim et al., 2019).

According to Mellyan (2021), device addiction can also cause children to become less focused or concentrated (especially concentration in learning), more emotional, pseudo-maturity (it looks like

they are getting bigger physically, but their mental maturity level is stagnant), not expressive in expressing their feelings (there is no change in facial expressions), low fighting power, more easily exposed to various bad things in cyberspace (such as pornography, violence, etc.), weak ability to feel sensations in the real world, and difficult to understand moral values. Given that the dangers that can be caused by device addiction are quite significant for Generation Alpha, the role of parents is very important in educating and guiding them so that they can be protected from the dangers of device addiction.

Effective Parenting Methods to Protect Generation Alpha from Gadget Addiction

Generation Alpha is the smartest generation; they started school at the age of three to four, so sociologists claim that this generation is the most educated generation (Fadzil et al., 2016). Generation Alpha is also a generation that is inseparable from the world of technology and gadgets. Gadgets certainly benefit Generation Alpha because they can more easily communicate with peers (Chasanah & Kilis, 2017).

The existence of devices, in the form of tablets or mobile phones, in addition to bringing goodness, can also cause addiction, which is bad for Generation Alpha, so this is a challenge for parents who raise them in the era of globalization (Fadzil et al., 2016). A survey conducted in 2014, by Millward Brown, a company based in the UK, regarding the duration of screen time of people every day in 30 countries, found that Indonesia has the longest screen time duration, followed by the Philippines and China (Chasanah & Kilis, 2017). Fadzil et al. (2016) cited research from Microsoft, that families in Asia lack a monitoring process when children use devices. In fact, previous research showed information that more than half of the respondents, 53 percent, from all countries in Asia admitted that their families did not set conditions or limits on the use of devices at home.

Parents of Generation Alpha must be aware of the dangers of device addiction. A study by Taylor and Hattingh (2019) found that seven-year-old children who enjoy playing games on their devices have reading skills below their peers who do not spend time using devices. At the same time, computer games take them away from social connections with the world around them. It also has an impact in terms of health, especially on the aspects of vision and nervous tension in the long run. Children also have the potential to experience problems related to metabolism, as they do not use physical movement while playing. Games conducted on mobile devices lack human characteristics because there is no touch of the soul and characteristics that show love, which cannot be learned naturally from electronic devices, while at the same time, the main aspects of child development and education, especially in the early stages of their age, are related to the formation of personality, social skills, improvement of emotional aspects and the application of socio-spiritual values (Fadzil et al., 2016).

An effective way as parents to prevent Generation Alpha from device addiction is to start by using technology itself to monitor and limit the use of devices by their children (for example, supervision or restriction can be done by using the Parental Control feature on the device used by the child). Restrictions on the use of these devices need to be well communicated to children. This is in line with what was written by Epstein et al. (1976) in an article entitled "The Family as a Social Unit". They explained that some of the characteristics of a healthy family are communication, involvement with each other and behavior control; so that after the restrictions on the use of gadgets are applied to Generation Alpha, it is necessary to explain why the restrictions are carried out. The language of

communication used with them, of course, is adjusted to the age of the child. The next thing that is no less important is the communicative interaction between parents and their children who are the Alpha Generation category. The existence of gadgets is not a solution for parents to avoid being disturbed by their children. Parents need to have special time to interact with their children. Parental involvement is important in the development of Generation Alpha, so that they are not focused on gadgets. Doing activities with them is something that parents can do. These activities can include doing sports.

The Church's Role in Teaching Effective Parenting Methods

The church today is expected to play a role in helping parents to raise Alpha Generation children effectively. This is so that parents do not feel alone in their efforts to raise the Alpha Generation, which has different characters and needs compared to the time they (parents) were born. Generation Alpha is said by Uhrig (2021) to be the most educated, self-taught and secure generation with technology that can provide free access to information. The Alpha generation is involved with at least three major technologies in their lives, namely holograms, artificial intelligence and robotics. The above facts can encourage churches to provide support to Alpha Generation parents in raising their children to know and fear God.

Churches, today, seem to be having a hard time reaching Generation Alpha in the digitized and rapidly changing era of globalization involving social media, mobile activities, and free virtual spaces. Generation Alpha exists in two different dimensions that are increasingly merging to form a physical and virtual world (Gultom, 2023). Another factor is the divisiveness of the church (at least churches outside Indonesia) towards the LGBTQ+ movement that is being campaigned massively, to be accepted and justified. The above conditions make the church must quickly improve in how they participate to help parents raise their children who are Generation Alpha.

Gultom (2023) describes the Alpha Generation as having a low level of spirituality. Studies have shown that religious attitudes, values, and practices are passed down from parents to children (Spilman et al., 2013). This encourages the church to help parents raise the Alpha Generation well by equipping their parents with good and true spiritual values. Children of religious parents will have Christian beliefs and practices in adolescence that carry over into adulthood. This illustrates that there seems to be a strong connection between religiosity in the family of origin (i.e. the religious values of the parents) and the beliefs and values of their children (Ibid). The church can apply this by equipping parents with true truth values, so that Generation Alpha, their children, can better internalize these truth values. This step can also be used as a step to avoid what Gultom (2023) worries about, namely the low spirituality of the Alpha Generation.

In addition to equipping Generation Alpha parents with the right spiritual values, the church must also be able to make breakthroughs in the media, especially in relation to the preaching of God's Word. Today, it is not uncommon for Generation Alpha, through the media, to idolize individuals from various fields, be it artists, actors, athletes, musicians, to influencers such as YouTubers, and this can have a huge impact on how they see themselves. In this situation, churches are expected to collaborate with parents, to prepare interesting and relevant content on digital media or social media, in order to shape the Alpha Generation's self-image according to the truth of God's Word (Ibid). This will certainly help parents in raising Generation Alpha in accordance with Christian values.

Francis et al. (2018) suggest that churches also have a strategy to engage the network of friends within the church for young people. This can certainly be applied to churches that have youth classes (according to the age range of Generation Alpha). Having peers, who have Christian values, certainly makes it easier for Generation Alpha to be able to learn the truth of God's Word.

Discussion

This discussion section examines the research findings on the church's role in teaching effective parenting methods to protect Generation Alpha from the dangers of gadget addiction. The research highlights the distinctive features of Generation Alpha as a generation born in the era of digital technology, marking them with high digital literacy from an early age and adaptability to rapid technological developments. However, this also brings challenges, including the risk of device addiction, which threatens their physical and mental health.

In this context, the role of the church becomes significant. The church, as an institution rooted in spiritual and moral values, has the potential to assist parents in guiding Generation Alpha. Through Christian education and parenting programs organized by churches, parents can be provided with knowledge and ways to overcome parenting challenges in the digital age. Research shows that a parenting approach that integrates spiritual values and character education such as discipline, responsibility and empathy, can have a positive impact on child development.

Churches are also faced with the challenge of reaching out to the younger generation who are more accustomed to digital interactions than face-to-face. Therefore, innovative strategies are needed from the church to attract the interest and participation of Generation Alpha, including using digital media as a means of teaching and communication. This includes developing content that is relevant to their lives and utilizing social media platforms to strengthen church community networks. Apart from being provided for the children, this church community can also be provided for the parents, which can serve as a platform to share challenges faced in educating the Alpha Generation and consult on solutions to overcome them. The results of discussions in this community network can be summarized and used as parenting guidelines that can be continuously updated and supplemented to overcome the challenges in guiding Generation Alpha to avoid the dangers of gadget addiction. In addition, active encouragement from parents and interactive and creative worship programs are expected to increase the Alpha Generation's interest in attending face-to-face church services that can facilitate social activities, which will help reduce the potential for gadget addiction in the Alpha Generation.

In addition, the study suggests the importance of collaboration between churches, parents, and educational institutions in developing a comprehensive educational program on the healthy use of technology. By combining resources and expertise from various parties, a supportive environment can be created for Generation Alpha to grow into individuals who are not only technologically proficient but also have a balance in spiritual and social aspects and good self-control to use devices wisely and avoid the dangers of device addiction.

This research highlights the important role of the church in the digital age, not only as a place of worship but also as a source of support for families facing parenting challenges. By teaching effective and value-based parenting methods, churches can help protect Generation Alpha from the dangers of gadget addiction, while preparing them for a healthy and productive future.

Conclusion

This research investigates the role of the church in strengthening parents' ability to nurture Generation Alpha, particularly in the context of preventing device addiction. By analyzing existing literature, this study reveals that Generation Alpha, growing up in a rich digital environment, requires specific guidance and boundaries to ensure a healthy and balanced use of technology. The church, through the programs and education it offers, has great potential to assist parents in this task.

The results show that the church's approach in guiding parents and children on the responsible use of technology can have a significant impact on achieving a balance between the digital and non-digital lives of Generation Alpha. The values and spirituality-based education, delivered by the church, not only strengthens children's digital competencies but also enriches them with values that will guide them in using technology responsibly.

In addition, the research findings suggest that churches can serve as a support community for parents, offering them resources and support in facing parenting challenges in the digital age. Through collaboration with educational institutions and communities, churches can also raise awareness and prepare Generation Alpha to face the digital world responsibly and ethically.

The conclusion is that this study emphasizes the important role of the church in the digital age, not only as a place of worship but also as a strategic partner of parents in the character-building of Generation Alpha. Through a holistic and value-based approach, churches can help ensure that future generations can utilize technology to enrich their life experiences while anticipating potential dangers.

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