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The ‘Connected’ Mother: Maternal Care and Responsibility in the Mother-Child-Teacher Nexus in Digital Kerala

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Abstract: In an era that prophesies the emergence of AI mothers and ‘pregnancy robots’, anxieties about technological encroachments on parenthood emphasise the need to reconsider the existing forms of digitalisation and their resultant impacts on the notion of ‘motherhood’. This chapter seeks to examine how digitalisation has reshaped the functionalities and expectations of maternal responsibility in Kerala, particularly within the mother-child-teacher nexus. To this end, the chapter will analyse how digitality has transformed the mother’s participation in the child’s educational growth, particularly through the ease of communication between the mother and the education industry. It will examine whether digitality has lightened maternal responsibility or if it has increased maternal pressure, especially in reference to the romanticized notion of the ‘good mother’.

The study intends to employ a mixed-method approach, combining an online survey on young mothers conducted through Google Forms and in-depth qualitative interviews with older mothers. The latter will focus on an older generation of mothers who have limited familiarity with digital tools, thereby offering insight into their lived experiences of motherhood. This comparative framework allows for an exploration of the evolution of maternal practices under digitalisation, while also highlighting the unintended outcomes that accompany digitally mediated motherhood. The study illuminates ideas of invisible labour, unequal access, and cultural pressures that are often left out of celebratory discourses about “Digital Kerala” and “digital motherhood.” Most of the research concerning the idea of digital motherhood has emerged from Eurocentric contexts, and this study will centralise this idea in Kerala’s diverse socio-culture, which often juxtaposes the digital with the traditional.

Keywords: *Digital Motherhood, Maternal Practices, Parenthood, Maternal Pressure, Maternal Agency*

Introduction

At the onset of the digital revolution, early feminists perceived the exponential digitalisation of social spaces as a means of subverting traditional notions of femininity and eventually liberating women from fixed identities coded in patriarchal roles (Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1991; Wajcman, 2004). Though this notion was later critiqued for its utopian vision of a gender-free world (Cook et al, 2004), digital media's role in shaping the concepts and functions of the 'ideal' woman is significant. Thus, the notion of motherhood, despite long being ascribed to the realm of biological nature by patriarchal discourses, is also entwined with digitalised systems and computerised technologies in the present day socio- economic cultures. Technological influence on motherhood has come to be an all-encompassing one, from tracking ovulation and clinical confirmation of pregnancies to parenthood aids; digitality becomes integral to the average middle-class mother. The Covid 19 Crisis further accelerated the growth of the digitally available mother. Social isolation and disrupted care networks, along with the exponential development in digital spaces for education, communication, and networking, compelled mothers to increasingly rely on online platforms for support, communication, and the performance of maternal roles (Saleh et al., 2023; CohenMiller & Izenkova, 2022).

In an era that prophesies the emergence of AI mothers and 'pregnancy robots' ("The Future of Digital Motherhood"), anxieties about technological encroachments on motherhood and maternal identity emphasise the need to reconsider the existing forms of digitalisation and their resultant impacts on the notion of 'motherhood' as experienced by the everyday mother in her practical social circumstances rather than a potential future. This paper traces out the relations between the education industry and motherhood in Kerala, and how digital technology and communication media have transformed these relations, and in turn the identity and responsibilities ascribed to the 'connected' mother. Thus, this chapter seeks to examine how digitalisation has reshaped the functionalities and expectations of maternal responsibility in Kerala, particularly within the mother-child-teacher nexus. To this end, the chapter will analyse how digitality has transformed the mother's participation in the child's educational growth, particularly through technologically mediated communication between the mother, the child, and the education industry. Moreover, the project highlights issues of invisible labour, unequal access, and cultural pressures that are often ignored within celebratory narratives of "Digital Kerala".

Literature Review

The idea of the 'connected' mother, particularly in relation to notions of care, responsibility, and maternity in the digitalised world, has brought forth diverse scholarship. Critics have examined various notions, such as the "digital maternal gaze" (Van Cleef et al, 2020), ICT's role in migrant mothering (Monini et al), and the criticality of digital connections to contemporary motherhood. Conversely, Jodi Hall argues that digital surveillance leads to maternal self-doubt and the propagation of hegemonic mothering practices (2023). Studies have delved into the evolution of the modern mother who has to guide their digitally native children differently, and the psychological and pedagogical assistance such efforts offer to mothers (Mazurchuk & Mazurchuk, 2020).

However, these studies are often qualitative and emerge from Eurocentric contexts. Of the few exceptional cases emerging from non-European contexts, the focus is often on the educational quality, practices, and demands, or is primarily focused on the children's development under modern digitalised education rather than the mother herself, whose labour becomes the invisible interlinkage between the two aspects. A similar attempt studies mothers' varying levels of attentiveness towards children in their educational assistance in relation to the mother's social media use (Saeed and Ali, 2026). While Saeed and Ali delve into the cultural implications of the education- mother- child nexus in the digital age, it limits itself to the area of social media usage and does not deeply investigate the mother's role within educational digital platforms.

This paper seeks to address these issues, particularly within a smaller south eastern framework of digitality in its focus on mothering as followed in the Indian state of Kerala. Kerala offers an interesting site of study, as the state is often perceived as 'the leader of digitality' within the country after the covid 19 crisis (Ummer et al, 2021), but the adoption of digital tools remains vastly inconsistent with gender, class, and geographical boundaries (Padmakumari, 2021; Daniel and Bastin, 2025). Thus, Kerala becomes a state where digitality has encroached upon everyday life. Yet, its extent remains largely unequal, offering a wider perspective into the adoption and appropriation of digital media and technologies by young mothers within the state.

Finally, most of the studies conducted on similar subjects have been quantitative, particularly limited to the survey format, while the paper seeks to integrate qualitative and quantitative methodologies, with primacy given to direct discourse-based evidence gathered during the online survey rather than statistical data. This paper thus hopes to produce a nuanced, interdisciplinary study that can better capture the fluid interplay between digital technology, motherhood, and the educational sector, thereby situating the present study within a broader effort to critically map the shifting contours of digital motherhood.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach using a Google Forms-based questionnaire as its primary data collection tool. A total of 33 respondents participated in the study, selected through a snowball sampling technique. The questionnaire was circulated by the researcher through personal networks and shared across various digital platforms and online communities. This approach was particularly suited to reaching dispersed respondents from various educational and economic backgrounds within Kerala.

The Google form incorporated several open-ended, short-answer questions, enabling participants to provide detailed responses. These answers showcased respondents' lived experiences, reflections, and interpretations of digital motherhood, which were given primary significance over the quantitative data due to the smaller sample size. The collected responses are examined through discourse analysis to understand various personal meanings centered around motherhood, technology use, labour, and surveillance. This analytical approach allows for an examination of underlying assumptions, power relations, and cultural norms embedded in participants' narratives. The interpretation is further informed by feminist theoretical frameworks on motherhood and digitality,

enabling a critical reading of how gendered expectations and socio-technical structures shape women's experiences in digital environments.

Results

In the demographic profile of 33 respondents, 78.8% mothers are between 26 and 35 years of age, while the remaining 21.2% belong to the 35-45 age bracket. A significant proportion of mothers have children in primary school (75.8%), though many also reported children in pre-primary (39.4%), upper primary (21.2%), secondary (15.2%), and with fewer in higher secondary (6.1%) levels. In terms of educational attainments of mothers, 48.5% mothers hold postgraduate degrees or higher, marking the maternal educational qualification relatively high. It is followed by 21.2% with higher secondary education, undergraduate form 9.1%, and mothers' with secondary levels of education, are 6.1%. Moreover, 15.2% reported that their education qualification did not fit within the predefined categories and hence were recorded as the 'other' category.

Among the respondents, 75.8% of mothers reported that their children engage with digital platforms on a daily basis for educational purposes. The remaining respondents are evenly divided between occasional use and usage several times a week (12.1% each). However, despite the availability of dedicated school portals, only 21.2% mothers make use of them. Instead, WhatsApp, an informal and easily accessible communication app, dominates as a communication tool between mothers and teachers (100%), making it a common mode of digital interaction. This is followed by phone calls (30.3%) and Zoom meetings (6.1%). Moreover, some respondents also reported relying on other platforms such as Google, ChatGPT, and YouTube, reflecting the diversification of digital tools aiding education.

The responses suggest that the digital platforms have become the primary medium of communication between mothers and teachers. While a substantial majority of mothers (97%) reported receiving homework and assignment instructions through these media, 87.9% received examination schedules, assessment updates, and general announcements such as school events, holidays, and meetings. Only 24.2% reported receiving academic progress reports and behavioural or disciplinary feedback. In addition, 63.6% mothers indicated that they receive multimedia learning materials such as PDFs, videos, and links. Requests for parental involvement in the child's learning process were received by 48.5% mothers, whereas 39.4% reported receiving child-specific concern from teachers. Significantly, only 3% mothers stated that teachers communicate the behavioral and educational problem within the performance of their children through these digital platforms.

Of the 26 questions in the survey, 4 were open-ended and required short paragraph-type answers from the respondents, while 6 offered the participants to choose from preset options or add their own answer. These questions were related to personal details, preferences, and reflections and opinions on statements related to the idea of digitality in education and digital motherhood. These responses were given primacy within the study, with statistical data acting as additional evidence. The major findings based on narrative analysis and additional data are as follows:

A) Shifting Boundaries of the Personal and Professional

When the participants were asked to choose the digital platforms and tools that they came in contact with most often in relation to their child's educational needs, the instant messaging application, WhatsApp, dominated all other categories, with 100% of the participants choosing it as a primary means of communication within the three-way nexus. The app is used for conveying homework and assignments, general announcements, and relaying schedules and reminders. The widespread adoption of WhatsApp in India has positioned it as the dominant medium for interpersonal communication, with its influence particularly pronounced in digitally literate states such as Kerala. Recent estimates indicate that India hosts over 535 million WhatsApp users ("WhatsApp users in India" Couponsly). Such saturation underscores the platform's centrality in everyday life.

The increasing reliance on WhatsApp as a primary mode of communication between the teacher, child, and mother reveals a significant blurring of personal and professional boundaries, particularly within the context of motherhood. As a digital messaging platform, the distinctions between the private and the public spheres in terms of information shared, mode of communication, language forms, and shaping of persona occur at pervue of the user. However, when educational needs are transferred to such a site, additional parties, such as children, gain access to the application, and the information shared in there goes beyond the primary chatroom for education communication. A participant writes regarding her concerns about digital media:

"She [The child] does her homework on her own, checks if any messages are sent by the teacher herself. But that sometimes concerns me [because] she goes through my entire WhatsApp sometimes. Also, teachers sent late messages, and even early morning mssgs asking to bring some books that aren't there in the timetable. I mostly miss out on those, creating tension between me and my child. Meanwhile my younger one gets comparatively lesser homeworks through phone [but] she also demands my phone several times a day to see if her teacher has sent something."

Here, the mother's privacy is constantly breached by the child and other additional parties, as the class-based chatrooms are seen as a public space of either parental interaction or communication between the children. This becomes a significant issue for mothers with young children who do not have devices of their own. There is a presumed availability of the mother irrespective of the mother's need for self-care, rest, and professional development. This is a trait of intensive mothering where a mother is expected to perform maternal duties at the expense of personal time and autonomy by being available to the physical, psychological, and cognitive needs of the child. "Over time, the necessity of parental involvement became more taken-for-granted, and the ideal parental role moved from one of providing direct assistance to children to one of creating the right environment for children to take self-responsibility; a shift that involved more emotion management on the part of mothers" (Jezierski & Wall, 811).

The attempts by the mothers to retain their personal boundaries are often negated under the primacy of the child and its educational needs over the mothers' autonomy and privacy. Such invasions allude to Virginia Woolf's call for "a room of one's own," emphasizing the importance of personal space for selfhood. For the middle-class digital mother, such spaces are increasingly eroded. The educational industry frequently normalizes the use of the mother's phone number or digital accounts for school-related communication, reinforcing an expectation of constant maternal availability. In contrast, fathers are often positioned as "busy," "working," or otherwise engaged in activities deemed more important, thereby exempting them from such digital interruptions. This dynamic produces a form of digital conditioning, wherein mothers are expected to sacrifice their time, privacy, data, and even digital identity in service of their children's educational and communicative needs.

The relative absence of platforms such as Google Classroom, Moodle, Microsoft Teams, or even more formal Email applications within these communicative practices warrants critical attention. In many Western educational contexts, these tools constitute the primary modes of interaction between teachers, students, and parents, structured around formalized and institutionally regulated channels (Selwyn, 2011). Unlike WhatsApp, such platforms tend to preserve clearer boundaries between personal and professional domains. To illustrate, Email communication is inherently asynchronous, allowing recipients to respond at their discretion and thereby maintaining a degree of temporal autonomy, as the immediacy to respond to messages about children has been cited as a cause of stress by over 48% of participants in the study. Moreover, Phone calls emerge as the second most prominent mode of communication (30%), further intensifying this dynamic as phone calls demand real-time engagement, reinforcing expectations of constant availability. The sharing of personal phone numbers with individuals who may not have a pre-existing personal relationship also complicates boundaries between private and professional life.

As Nancy K Baym notes, asynchronous systems enable more controlled and less intrusive interaction (Baym, 113-115). Furthermore, these platforms restrict forms of personal visibility that are characteristic of social media environments. In such methods, the educational sector that is involved with the child is not afforded access to the mother's self-expression and interests. In social media-based platforms such as WhatsApp, such expressions can be viewed by most of the contacts saved, regardless of the level of intimacy, and even influence the educator's behavior and perception of the child.

Alternatively, the limited adoption of such platforms can also be understood as indicative of the community's preference for immediacy and relational proximity over institutional distance, aligning with broader socio-cultural tendencies of South Asia that privilege communal attachments over personal autonomy. Here, a more personal relationship between the mother and the educator is fostered, which could aid the educational growth of the child and the personal growth of the mother, as the majority of participants (51%) do not feel stressed due to such communication, and over 39% of respondents believe these strengthen the ties within this three-way relationship. However, this also raises questions about professionalism and the sustainability of such expectations.

B) Technology as the (Dis)Connector

In the modern educational landscape, digital technologies form the integral connective infrastructures that reconfigure the traditional dynamics between teachers, mothers, and children. The traditional classroom often placed the teacher as the authority figure, the child as the passive recipient, and the mother as the background assistant in the educational process. Digital connectivity transforms this as the mother increasingly assumes the role of a central mediator, linking the child to institutional frameworks, digital knowledge systems, and broader communicative networks. A participant claims:

I faced tough times when it came to studies. My parents, though loving, were uneducated, so they couldn't guide me with homework or projects. Back then, no Google, no YouTube tutorials – it was just me, textbooks, and limited resources. Fast forward to today, parents are educated, and tech is everywhere! Kids now have access to online classes, educational apps, and instant answers. It's a game-changer – students are more updated and ahead.

The majority of the participants (57% Yes + 27% Maybe) believe that digitality shifts the responsibility of education onto mothers. Mothers do not merely teach or reteach the information covered in the classroom, but are actively responsible for relaying, responding, and regulating the educational process of the child. Here, technology functions as an enabling conduit, allowing mothers to access, interpret, and transmit information from and across multiple domains. This has helped mothers to extend their reach beyond the domestic sphere into global circuits of knowledge. With access to the internet, the teacher and the information relayed directly from the teacher no longer retain their primary position. The mother gains access to informational networks and pedagogical methodologies through various parenting communities independent of the teacher, thereby redistributing epistemic power within the educational structure.

Approximately 85% of participants reported that technology has been beneficial in enhancing their learning by introducing new concepts and clarifying previously difficult or confusing topics. Digital maternal communities also help mothers connect with one another to exchange advice, share experiential knowledge, and seek emotional support. These networks function as collaborative spaces of learning and affirmation, enabling what may be conceptualized as a form of distributed parenting. As Maharjan and Uprety observe, digital platforms allow mothers to “bridge the gap between their children's digital world and the physical realm,” while also fostering “knowledge exchange, emotional support and collective problem solving” (42). Here, digitality enhances both informational and affective connectivity, expanding the scope of maternal engagement beyond immediate familial boundaries.

The children's own autonomy also increases with such connectivity. “They are able to do things alone up to a limit,” claims a mother. Digitality provides access to a global pool of digital knowledge regardless of time and place, reducing children's dependence on teachers and mothers. Conversely, such a scenario also leads to increased reliance on screens for learning, reducing direct, person-to-

person engagement between mothers, children, and teachers, often rendering interpersonal relationships superficial.

The implications of technological connectivity also extend to cognitive and pedagogical processes. When the respondents were asked to distinguish between their own learning and their child's methods, many noted how digitised education leads to loss of observational and personal skills, with children being categorised as becoming 'lazy' and immoral. Fauziddin et al. noted how the increasing digitalization of early education can influence children's "cognitive, social, and emotional development, particularly when engagement becomes passive rather than exploratory" (160). . Similarly, Ahmed et al. highlight the broader developmental implications of sustained digital media use, emphasizing the need for guided and balanced interaction. These concerns suggest regulation of digital platforms once again is placed on the mother, further adding to her responsibility in contemporary educations.

Ironically, this once again reinforces the traditional normative motherhood through its promotion of intensive mothering. This intensifies expectations of maternal involvement and reconstructs as digital version of the 'good mother' ideal, one who is constantly available, aware, responsive and often held responsible for children's digital media use. These outwardly positive outcomes paradoxically increase maternal stress because of the comparison and subsequent competition that are further propagated through social media platform and school chatrooms alike.

C) The Involved Mother

As the previous section noted, technology facilitates a higher level of involvement in the child's life by the mother. While a section believes this is a cause of stress, and merely reformulated traditional responsibilities than actively aid the modern mother. A section celebrates the extra level of involvement. The survey reveals that many mothers are happy about the advent of technology because it helps them to remain more informed in the educational development of their children as it provides them a sense of purpose and dignity. Accordingly, they claim they don't feel particularly stressed about the demand for their involvement in the educational activities of their children and appreciate the ability to better monitor their children.

The technology induced involvement of mothers also reinforces what Dr. Haim Ginott, has termed 'helicopter parenting'. Ginott's further articulates the mother's tendency toward continuous monitoring and intervention in the child's developmental processes. Within this paradigm, the "good mother" is often constructed as one who is constantly available, emotionally invested, and actively engaged in managing the child's educational trajectory. Technology, in this sense, amplifies rather than reduces these expectations by enabling perpetual connectivity and real-time responsiveness. Empirical literature further substantiates these findings. Head (2020) argues that the digitalisation of home-school relations has contributed to the bureaucratisation of parental involvement, wherein managing communication and information increasingly becomes central to parenting practices. Thus, these levels of 'involvement' can often be detrimental to the parent and child alike.

The survey responses reflect this ambivalence. While a considerable number of mothers express appreciation for technology's role in facilitating involvement, many simultaneously normalize the associated stress as an inherent component of responsible motherhood. Such normalization aligns with the internalization of normative motherhood ideals, wherein maternal sacrifice and emotional labour are interpreted as markers of care and adequacy. This is particularly evident in the articulation of "involvement" as both a duty and a virtue, wherein increased engagement is equated with effective parenting regardless of its psychological or temporal costs.

Conversely, over 30% respondents claim that digitalisation devalues maternal care and weakens mother-child relationship. The findings suggest that technology simultaneously constructs and complicates the figure of the "involved mother." It enables greater connectivity and informational access while also reinforcing normative expectations of intensive, always-available motherhood. The resulting configuration is neither wholly emancipatory nor fully burdensome but is instead marked by ongoing negotiation, ambivalence, and contextual variability. In this sense, technology functions less as a determinant of maternal experience and more as an infrastructural condition within which contemporary motherhood is viewed through personal experience.

This attests to the idea of domestication in media studies, where ultimately technological expansion does not move in a singular or deterministic manner; rather, it produces a dynamic interplay depending on an individual appropriation and expectation towards the technology leading to expanded access, reconfigured relationships, and evolving forms of knowledge exchange, all of which continue to reshape the contours of the teacher-mother-child nexus.

Conclusion

The 2025 South Korean disaster film, set in an apocalyptic world where human consciousness can only persist in artificial bodies, revolves around the idea of refining an AI mother capable of raising and sustaining the future of an artificial humanity. After thousands of failed attempts, wherein the mother's consciousness fails to save the son, finally, the mother chooses to die along with the son, which is marked as a successful attempt. The movie, despite all its futuristic science and technology, still reverts to presenting the sacrificial mother as the 'good' mother.

The contemporary scenarios around technology and motherhood seem to echo similar patterns, wherein, despite the exponential growth of technological aids and digital freedom, the roles and responsibilities of motherhood echo similar confining narratives in a new language. The present study demonstrates that while technology has reconfigured the teacher-mother-child nexus by transforming communication, educational participation, and maternal involvement within the domestic sphere, there are instances where the utopic vision of technology fails to contest patriarchal inhibitions. While these technologies grant greater parental involvement, additional support, and accessibility to various resources for mothers and children alike, they simultaneously intensify expectations surrounding motherhood by reinforcing ideals of constant availability, intensive parenting, and affective labour.

The findings also indicate that technological use and its role in redefining conventional identities need not be deterministic; rather than narratives of the utopian helper and dystopian replacement to motherhood, maternal relations to technology are shaped through relations with one another and how they get appropriated and utilised for specific needs. The digital mother remains in a complex socio-cultural condition that simultaneously expands possibilities for connectivity, participation, and support while also reproducing new forms of pressure, surveillance, and normative maternal expectations in contemporary culture.

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