

**Digital Motherhood:
A Bibliometric Analysis of Mothers' Online Advice-Seeking Behaviour**

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed parenting practices, with mothers increasingly turning to online platforms for advice, emotional support, and guidance on health-related matters. This study presents a bibliometric analysis of research on mothers' online advice-seeking behaviour, aiming to map the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research trends within the interdisciplinary field. Publications indexed in Scopus between 2016 and 2025 were screened using PRISMA framework, yielding 177 eligible studies for analysis. Co-citation and co-occurrence analyses were conducted using VOSviewer to identify intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging research trends within the field. Co-citation analysis was conducted to identify foundational knowledge bases and influential research streams, while co-occurrence analysis of author keywords was used to reveal dominant themes and emerging research directions. The findings indicate that maternal online advice-seeking research is strongly anchored in public health, maternal psychology, and digital health communication, with focus on breastfeeding, pregnancy, infant care, and postpartum support. Digital platforms, social media and mobile technologies, have emerged as central ecosystems for exchanging maternal information and providing peer-based support. The results highlight the dual role of online parenting spaces as extensions of healthcare communication systems and informal social support networks. However, the literature remains heavily concentrated on biomedical concerns, with limited attention to sociotechnical issues such as

digital misinformation, influencer-driven parenting cultures, and algorithmic content exposure. This study contributes a comprehensive overview of research landscape and offers insights to inform future scholarship, digital parenting practices, and maternal health communication interventions.

Keywords: Online Parenting Support, Parenting, Social Media, Motherhood, Online Advice-Seeking

1. Introduction

Parenting in the digital era has undergone a profound transformation, with mothers increasingly turning to online platforms as primary sources of information, emotional support, and practical guidance. The rapid expansion of digital media, social networking sites, parenting forums, and influencer-driven content has transformed the way parenting knowledge is produced, accessed, and consumed (McSorley et al., 2022). Rather than relying solely on family elders, healthcare professionals, or formal parenting programmes, many mothers now seek advice through blogs, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, Facebook groups, TikTok videos, and mobile applications dedicated to child development and family well-being. This shift reflects broader changes in information-seeking behaviour, where immediacy, accessibility, and peer-to-peer interaction have become central to modern parenting practices (Sepahpour-Fard & Quayle, 2022).

In recent years, the trend of online parenting has intensified due to increased smartphone penetration, algorithm-driven content recommendation, and the emergence of “mom influencers” and parenting key opinion leaders (KOLs). Online communities provide mothers with round-the-clock access to experiential knowledge, shared parenting struggles, and culturally relevant advice (Eldeeb et al., 2025). Digital platforms also enable mothers to engage in participatory learning by asking questions, sharing personal experiences, and validating their parenting decisions through collective feedback (Hiito et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift, as physical isolation, school closures, and limited access to healthcare services increased dependence on digital parenting resources for childcare, education, emotional regulation, and family management (Aksoy & Neill, 2025).

Despite its benefits, the growing reliance on online parenting advice also presents several challenges. The quality and credibility of online information remain inconsistent, with misinformation, commercial bias, and unverified claims widely circulating across platforms (Treadgold et al., 2023). Mothers may encounter conflicting advice, unrealistic parenting standards, and idealised portrayals of motherhood that contribute to anxiety, guilt, and self-doubt (Altıntaş & Satılmış, 2025). In addition, algorithmic amplification of sensational content can prioritise engagement over accuracy, making it difficult for mothers to distinguish evidence-based guidance from anecdotal opinions (Gvozdenović & Bandalović, 2024). These concerns have also attracted increasing attention from international health organisations and public health agencies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has increasingly emphasised the importance of accessible, evidence-based digital health communication and maternal support systems to strengthen maternal and child well-being in digitally mediated environments.

Even though a growing body of literature exists on digital parenting and maternal online advice-seeking, limited studies have systematically mapped the intellectual structure, thematic development, and research evolution of this interdisciplinary field. Therefore, this study aims

to systematically examine the scholarly development of mothers' online advice-seeking behaviour within digital environments. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1.1 Identify the intellectual structure underpinning research on mothers' online advice-seeking behaviour through co-citation analysis.
- 1.2 Examine the dominant thematic patterns and emerging research trends through keyword co-occurrence analysis.
- 1.3 Analyse how digital platforms function as spaces for maternal health communication, parenting support, and information-sharing practices.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a bibliometric research design to systematically map the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research trends in scholarly literature on mothers' online parenting advice-seeking behaviour. The primary purpose of bibliometric analysis is to provide a quantitative and objective overview of the knowledge domain by identifying influential publications, leading authors, productive institutions, and emerging research themes (Murghayah et al., 2025). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, bibliometric analysis enables large-scale synthesis of scientific output, offering a comprehensive understanding of how research on digital parenting and maternal information-seeking has developed over time (Febryanti, 2025).

To examine the conceptual foundations of the field, a co-citation analysis is employed. Co-citation analysis identifies pairs of documents that are frequently cited together, indicating shared theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, or research concerns (Mee et al., 2025). By clustering co-cited references, this study reveals the major knowledge bases and intellectual schools of thought underpinning research on online parenting advice, including digital health communication, social support networks, and parental information behaviour (Li et al., 2025).

Additionally, a co-occurrence analysis of author keywords and indexed terms is conducted to identify the dominant research topics and emerging thematic patterns. Co-occurrence analysis examines how frequently specific keywords appear together within the same publications, allowing for the identification of core concepts such as maternal digital literacy, online peer support, parenting influencers, and health information-seeking behaviour (Yücel, 2025). Network visualisation techniques are used to illustrate thematic clusters and their interrelationships, thereby highlighting the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of this growing research domain (Nurfadilah et al., 2025).

2.1 Search Strategy

The literature retrieval process was conducted using the Scopus database, which was selected for its comprehensive coverage of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings. The search was performed within the TITLE-ABS-KEY field to ensure that the retrieved publications explicitly addressed the study's core focus. The search string used was: "*mother**" AND "*online*" AND "*advi*e*", allowing for the inclusion of lexical variations such as *mother*, *mothers*, *advice*, and *advising*. The time frame was restricted to publications between 2016 and 2025, and only articles, review papers, and conference papers written in English were included to ensure academic rigour and relevance.

Table 1 Inclusion Criteria for Bibliometric Analysis

Scopus Database	ALL
Time period	2016 to 2025
Search field	TITLE-ABS-KEY
Search keywords	“mother*” AND “online” AND “advi*e”
Document Types	Article, Review, & Conference Paper
Language	English

The study selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability. A total of 231 records were initially identified from the Scopus database. After applying the publication time filter (2016-2025), 35 records were excluded. The remaining 196 records were screened based on document type, resulting in the exclusion of 11 records that were not research articles, review papers, or conference papers. Subsequently, 185 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which eight were excluded due to language restrictions. Finally, 177 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the bibliometric analysis.

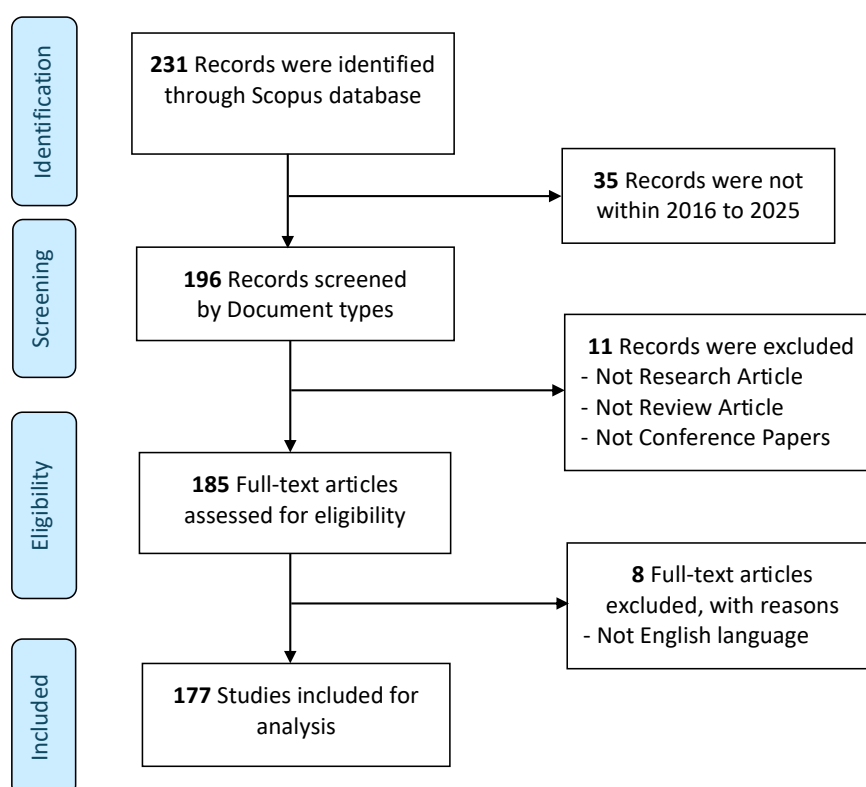


Figure 1 PRISMA Flowchart

3. Findings

3.1 Co-Citation Analysis

The co-citation analysis reveals the foundational intellectual structure underpinning research on mothers' information-seeking behaviour, particularly in relation to online advice and health-related parenting practices. The most influential co-cited work is Victora et al.

(2016), which provides a comprehensive global analysis of breastfeeding practices, mechanisms, and long-term health outcomes. Its high co-citation strength indicates that maternal advice-seeking research is strongly anchored in public health and maternal-child health scholarship. Closely linked is Rollins et al. (2016), which extends this discourse by examining policy investment and structural interventions needed to improve breastfeeding practices, highlighting the intersection between individual maternal behaviour and systemic healthcare support.

Table 2 Top Ten (10) Co-Citation Articles

Rank	Authors	Title	Citations	Total Link Strength
1	Victora et al. (2016)	Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect	8	9
2	Rollins et al. (2016)	Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices?	4	6
3	Asiodu et al. (2015)	Breastfeeding and use of social media among first-time African American mothers	3	7
4	Grimes et al. (2014)	Sources of information used by women during pregnancy to meet their information needs	3	5
5	Anderson et al. (2000)	Social-cognitive determinants of nutrition behavior among supermarket food shoppers: a structural equation analysis	2	4
6	Archer & Kao (2018)	Mother, baby and Facebook makes three: does social media provide social support for new mothers?	2	4
7	Aston (2002)	Learning to be a normal mother: empowerment and pedagogy in postpartum classes	2	3
8	Becker et al. (2016)	Methods of milk expression for lactating women	2	5
9	Clarke & Gross (2004)	Women's behaviour, beliefs and information sources about physical exercise in pregnancy	2	1
10	Bernhardt & Felter (2004)	Online pediatric information seeking among mothers of young children: results from a qualitative study using focus groups	2	3

A prominent thematic cluster emerges around maternal use of digital platforms for parenting guidance. Asiodu et al. (2015) and Archer and Kao (2018) illustrate how social media functions as a key informational and emotional support space for new mothers, particularly

among marginalised groups. These studies demonstrate that online environments serve not only as repositories of information but also as communities for shared experiences and social validation. Bernhardt and Felter (2004) further strengthen this digital health communication foundation by providing early qualitative evidence of mothers seeking paediatric information online.

Another conceptual strand centres on maternal learning and behavioural change. Grimes et al. (2014) and Clarke and Gross (2004) explore women's information sources during pregnancy, reinforcing the importance of credible guidance in shaping maternal decision-making. Aston (2002) highlights empowerment through postpartum education, while Anderson et al. (2000) introduce a social-cognitive perspective on health behaviour, which remains relevant for understanding digital advice adoption. Becker et al. (2016) contribute a clinical dimension by examining lactation practices, reinforcing the health-oriented core of maternal online advice-seeking research.

3.1.1 Co-Citation Analysis by Clusters

Cluster 1 represents a strong sociotechnical foundation centred on mothers' use of digital platforms for parenting knowledge, health information, and emotional support. This cluster highlights the transition of motherhood into digitally mediated spaces, where online communities, social media, and mobile technologies function as key support infrastructures. Studies by Archer and Kao (2018) and Lupton et al. (2016) demonstrate how platforms such as Facebook operate as peer-support environments that foster emotional reassurance, identity validation, and shared learning among new mothers. Guerra-Reyes et al. (2016) further show that mobile phones are vital tools for low-income mothers seeking postpartum health information, emphasising digital access as a form of maternal empowerment. Frey et al. (2022) reinforce this trend through their scoping review, confirming that social media has become a primary source of health information for parents. Collectively, this cluster reflects a shift from institution-led parenting guidance towards participatory, community-based digital knowledge systems that shape contemporary maternal advice-seeking behaviour.



Figure 2 Co-Citation Analysis (VOSviewer Visualisation)

Cluster 2 forms the biomedical and public health backbone of maternal advice-seeking research, with a primary focus on breastfeeding, maternal health outcomes, and early childhood nutrition. Highly cited works by Victora et al. (2016) and Rollins et al. (2016) position breastfeeding as a global public health priority, linking maternal practices to long-term health, cognitive, and economic benefits. Chowdhury et al. (2015) further reinforce this evidence base through meta-analytic validation of breastfeeding's protective health effects. Eidelman et al. (2012) and Hansen (2016) frame breastfeeding as both a clinical and socio-economic investment, while Moss et al. (2021) identify behavioural and social barriers that prevent exclusive breastfeeding. Meadows (2011) adds a psychosocial dimension by connecting perceived social support with maternal mental health. Together, this cluster reflects the

scientific authority that mothers increasingly seek online, illustrating how digital advice spaces function as extensions of public health communication systems.

Table 3 Co-Citation Analysis by Clusters

Cluster No and Colour	Cluster Labels	No. of Articles	Representative Publications
Cluster 1 (Red)	Digital Parenting, Online Support, and Maternal Information Behaviour	17	Archer & Kao (2018); Baxter (2018); Caut et al. (2020); Frey et al. (2022); Guerra-Reyes et al. (2016); Lupton et al. (2016); Lupton (2016); Walker et al. (2017)
Cluster 2 (Green)	Maternal Health, Breastfeeding, and Evidence-Based Parenting	11	Chowdhury et al. (2015); Eidelman et al. (2012); Hansen (2016); Meadows (2011); Moss et al. (2021); Rollins et al. (2016); Victora et al. (2016)

3.2 Co-Occurrence Analysis

The co-occurrence analysis provides insight into the dominant conceptual structure and thematic orientation of research on mothers' online advice-seeking and parenting information behaviour. Using a threshold of 63 occurrences, the analysis identified 1,888 keywords, of which 10 met the minimum frequency requirement, generating a dense network with 1,666 links and a total link strength of 10,761. The prominence of the keywords *human*, *female*, *adult*, and *mother* reflects the strong demographic and population-based orientation of the literature, indicating that research in this domain is primarily situated within maternal and adult health contexts. The high occurrence of *pregnancy* and *breastfeeding* further confirms that much of the scholarly focus centres on maternal health decision-making during the prenatal and postnatal periods.

Table 4 The 10 Most Frequent Keywords in the Co-Occurrence Analysis

Rank	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
1	human	133	1495
2	female	122	1443
3	article	89	1137
4	adult	84	1105
5	mother	74	934
6	pregnancy	62	657
7	psychology	52	676
8	questionnaire	50	768
9	child	48	587
10	breast feeding	44	518

Cluster 3 captures the psychological and emotional dimensions of motherhood, particularly during the postpartum period. Keywords, such as psychology, social support, qualitative research, thematic analysis, puerperium, and postpartum, indicate a strong focus on maternal mental health and emotional adjustment after childbirth. This cluster highlights how online advice-seeking functions as a coping strategy, offering reassurance, empathy, and peer validation during a vulnerable life stage. Digital parenting spaces serve as informal support networks that complement clinical care, helping mothers manage stress, anxiety, and transitions in their identity.

Cluster 4 forms the biomedical core of maternal advice-seeking research. Keywords, such as mother, infant, breastfeeding, infant feeding, lactation, and controlled study, reflect a strong emphasis on evidence-based infant nutrition and early-life health practices. This cluster shows that breastfeeding remains a central concern for mothers seeking online guidance, particularly when facing clinical challenges or interpreting medical recommendations. Digital platforms operate as extensions of healthcare communication, enabling mothers to access, compare, and contextualise professional advice within everyday parenting experiences.

Cluster 5 reflects a broader family and developmental perspective on maternal advice-seeking. Keywords, such as child, preschool child, adolescent, young adult, and male, indicate that online parenting guidance extends beyond infancy into later stages of child development. This cluster highlights how mothers seek support across multiple phases of the parenting journey, including early education, behavioural management, and adolescent well-being. The inclusion of ‘male’ also signals growing recognition of fathers and male caregivers, suggesting a gradual shift towards more inclusive family-oriented parenting research.

Table 5 Co-Occurrence Analysis of Keywords by Clusters

Cluster No and Colour	Cluster Label	Number of Keywords	Representative Keywords
Cluster 1 (Red)	Maternal Health Behaviour and Preventive Care	16	‘pregnancy’, ‘attitude to health’, ‘health care personnel’, ‘questionnaire’, ‘cross-sectional study’, ‘nutrition’
Cluster 2 (Green)	Digital Parenting and Online Social Ecosystems	14	‘human’, ‘female’, ‘article’, ‘internet’, ‘social media’, ‘parent relation’, ‘parents’
Cluster 3 (Blue)	Maternal Psychology and Postpartum Support	13	‘adult’, ‘psychology’, ‘qualitative research’, ‘social support’, ‘thematic analysis’, ‘puerperium’, ‘postpartum’
Cluster 4 (Yellow)	Infant Feeding and Clinical Parenting Practices	11	‘mother’, ‘infant’, ‘breast feeding’, ‘infant feeding’, ‘controlled study’, ‘major clinical study’, ‘lactation’
Cluster 5 (Purple)	Child Development and Family Lifecycle	9	‘male’, ‘child’, ‘young adult’, ‘preschool child’,

Cluster No and Colour	Cluster Label	Number of Keywords	Representative Keywords
			‘adolescent’, ‘human experiment’

4. Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis reveal that research on mothers’ online advice-seeking behaviour is shaped by a strong interdisciplinary knowledge base integrating public health, digital communication, psychology, and maternal education. The co-citation analysis demonstrates that maternal advice-seeking is deeply rooted in biomedical and public health scholarship, particularly in relation to breastfeeding, maternal nutrition, and early-life health practices. Influential works by Victora et al. (2016) and Rollins et al. (2016) position maternal decision-making within global health and policy frameworks, while studies by Asiodu et al. (2015), Archer and Kao (2018), and Bernhardt and Felter (2004) illustrate how digital platforms have become essential spaces for health information access and peer support.

The co-occurrence analysis further confirms that maternal online advice-seeking is strongly anchored in maternal health psychology, behavioural inquiry, and family-centred caregiving. Dominant keyword clusters highlight pregnancy, infant feeding, postpartum adjustment, social support, and child development as core thematic domains, reflecting the multifaceted needs that drive mothers to seek digital guidance. Notably, the prominence of social media and internet-related terms underscores the central role of digital ecosystems in shaping contemporary parenting practices.

Taken together, the results suggest that online parenting advice functions as an extension of both public health communication and informal peer-based support systems. However, the heavy concentration on biomedical topics also indicates a research gap in areas such as digital misinformation, influencer-driven parenting cultures, and the shaping of maternal perceptions through algorithmic content. Future research should therefore move beyond clinical parenting concerns to examine the broader sociotechnical forces influencing mothers’ digital parenting experiences.

4.1 Implications for Practice and Digital Parenting Support

The findings of this bibliometric analysis highlight the central role of digital platforms in shaping contemporary maternal advice-seeking and parenting practices. Given mothers’ strong reliance on online spaces for health, nutrition, breastfeeding, and emotional support, there is a growing need for credible, accessible, and evidence-based digital resources for parenting (Hiito et al., 2024). Healthcare providers, maternal health organisations, and early childhood agencies should strengthen their presence on social media and parenting platforms to disseminate accurate information and counter the spread of misinformation (Morse & Brown, 2022).

Integrating professional guidance into online parenting communities can enhance maternal health literacy while preserving the peer-support functions that mothers value (Severinsen et al., 2024). In addition, digital parenting programmes should be culturally responsive and inclusive, addressing diverse family structures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and caregiving roles (Nilsson et al., 2024). Designing user-friendly digital tools, mobile applications, and interactive platforms can further support mothers in making informed decisions across pregnancy, postpartum, and child development stages (Gebremariam et al., 2024).

4.2 Implications for Research and Policy Development

From a research perspective, the findings indicate a strong concentration of studies within the biomedical and maternal health domains, particularly in areas such as breastfeeding, nutrition, and early-life care (Zhu et al., 2024). Future research should expand beyond clinical parenting concerns to explore the sociotechnical dimensions of online advice-seeking, including influencer culture, algorithm-driven content exposure, and digital misinformation. More interdisciplinary studies combining health communication, media studies, psychology, and education are needed to better understand how digital environments shape maternal beliefs, behaviours, and parenting identities (LaMonica et al., 2024).

From a policy standpoint, governments and public health authorities should recognise digital parenting platforms as critical channels for maternal and child health communication (He et al., 2025). Developing national guidelines for online parenting information, digital health literacy programmes, and ethical standards for parenting content creators can help safeguard mothers from misleading or harmful advice (Bhattacharya & Singh, 2025). Strategic investment in digital maternal health initiatives will be crucial for enhancing family well-being in increasingly technology-mediated parenting environments (Bogic et al., 2025) and ensuring equitable access to accurate information across diverse sociocultural contexts (Castellon-Lopez et al., 2024).

5. Conclusions

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving scholarly landscape on mothers' online advice-seeking behaviour, highlighting its strong foundations in public health, maternal psychology, digital communication, and family studies. The findings demonstrate that mothers increasingly rely on digital platforms for guidance on pregnancy, breastfeeding, infant care, mental well-being, and child development. Online parenting spaces now function as extensions of healthcare communication systems and informal peer-support networks, offering timely, accessible, and experiential knowledge. However, the dominance of biomedical themes also reveals important research gaps related to digital misinformation, influencer-driven parenting cultures, and algorithmic content exposure, which may shape maternal beliefs and decision-making in complex ways.

6. Recommendations

Future studies should also explore how algorithm-driven recommendation systems and influencer-based parenting content shape maternal perceptions, parenting expectations, and health-related decision-making. Since social media algorithms often operate as “black box” systems that prioritise engagement and personalised exposure, mothers may unknowingly encounter repetitive, commercially driven, or emotionally amplified parenting content. Methodologically, future researchers may consider combining digital ethnography, platform analysis, algorithm auditing, and qualitative interviews to better understand how digital infrastructures influence maternal advice-seeking experiences and parenting behaviours across online environments.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), this study underscores the importance of strengthening digital maternal health ecosystems to promote informed parenting and healthy family environments. It is recommended that healthcare authorities, maternal health organisations, and early childhood agencies actively engage in digital platforms to provide verified, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based parenting

information. Policymakers should establish ethical guidelines and digital health literacy frameworks to protect mothers from misleading or harmful online content. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary approaches to examine the sociotechnical dynamics of digital parenting and develop innovative interventions that enhance maternal well-being, child health, and family resilience in an increasingly connected world.

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