

# Construction of the meaning of parenting styles and their relationship with visual mother character design on Instagram (Study of phenomenology in new parents Gaia Parenting followers)

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**Abstract.** This study aims to examine how the construction of meaning formed in new parents who follow parenting education accounts on Instagram, especially those formed in parenting patterns, and the appearance of the character design of the mother figure. The world of parenting education is currently growing rapidly because young parents now have more access to parenting information from new sources such as social media. As a medium for sharing visual content, the appearance of Instagram content is an important aspect that must be considered because it influences and increases audience interest. The character design itself has a role in the delivery of communication on the shared content. This research was conducted to determine the construction of the meaning of parenting formed among new parents and whether the character designs displayed are by the meaning of the formed parenting. Learning in parenting education is essential because it is related to parenting patterns formed in Indonesia, which will affect the quality of human resources. This research was conducted using a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to digging deeper into the meaning and experience of new parents on the design of the visual character of the mother figure in parenting style.

## 1 Introduction

The phenomenon of the use of social media as a medium for parenting education among new parents cannot be separated from technological advances accompanied by the increasing use of the internet. Social media is essential for disseminating information on parenting education and social support for parents [1]. Previously, new parents had less information and relied on knowledge from previous parents. Nowadays, young parents have more confidence in the information they get through the internet and books because parenting information access is more accessible and can be obtained online.

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Parents' lack of knowledge and skills regarding parenting can lead to mistreatment children [2]. Therefore, parenting is a challenge for couples who have just become parents. Because of these limitations, they look for media to meet their information needs for parenting skills. Parenting education accounts on Instagram are also considered to provide information that is easier and faster to access so that they can continue to follow new trends and information in the parenting world. Currently, parenting accounts in Indonesia use Instagram as a medium of communication and education to reach more young parents. Their target audience is mainly married millennials and young par-ents who want to learn about parenting and child development, so Instagram is one of the suitable media to share this education.

With an audience that has a different demographic than the previous era, the use character designs are used as an effort to increase reading interest and an effort to create emotional closeness. Using funny and anthropomorphic characters in advertisements and consumer goods is commonly used to represent a brand or organization [3].

The current digital age has made it easy for people to compare them-selves to the things they see online. It has been found that women tend to compare themselves to the pictures and people they see online [4]. The same study found that women were more likely to fantasize about their lives by imitating the images they saw on social media. It also found that captions on social media posts can influence how people view their bodies and self-esteem. It can be assumed that the same can happen when audiences or followers of parenting education accounts engage with uploading educational content about parenting and assessing their parenting skills.

In a previous study conducted by Coyne et al. [5] using social comparison theory, it was also found that mothers tend to compare themselves with the images and posts they use on social media. In addition, parenting educational content on Instagram must be displayed in a light and persuasive manner as well as visually appealing. How content is presented is as important as the content of the narrative itself. The more attractive the presentation, the more it will attract the audience's attention to absorb the information [6].

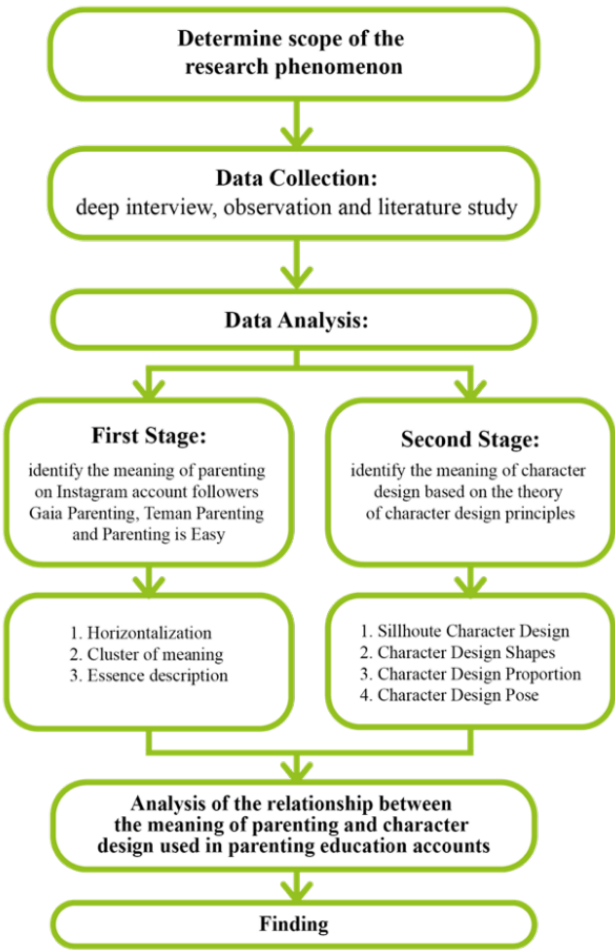
This study aims to examine in depth the meaning of parenting formed in new parents who follow the Gaia Parenting educational account and whether the character designs displayed are appropriate. While reading books and watching animated films, one can empathize and even feel the emotions of the character's experience. Emotional feelings and feelings of love that arise in character are external and internal image formation factors that affect the extent to which the audience is involved with the character. This study focuses on the characters that appear on the Gaia Parenting educational account, which is displayed in a simple 2D drawing style in terms of lines, colors, and expressions, as well as exploring the relationship between character images and the meaning of parenting that is formed among Gaia Parenting followers.

## **2 Research Methods**

In this study, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach was used. Data collection was carried out by in-depth interviews as the primary data source, observation, and literature study. The process of collecting data by interviewing informants was

carried out to find out the views and construction of meaning formed by new parents on the visual character of the mother figure on Instagram.

According to Plato in Sobur in Muzetto [7], phenomenology is the study of phenomena, about the appearance of one or several things that arise from the awareness of other people's experiences, including the way we give meaning to things that arise from experience. Phenomenology is a way how humans use to understand the world through direct experience (Littlejhon & Foss in Muzetto [7]). In this study, the researcher used Alfred Schutz's phenomenological methodology. Schutz's phenomenology states that two things become the motives of social actors in taking action [7]. Schutz classifies motives into two parts: because-motives (Weil-Motives) and in-order-to motives (Um-Zu-Motives).



**Fig. 1.** Research design.

The subjects in this study are young parents who follow Gaia Parenting, while the criteria for informants are young parents, both father and mother. These are determined because young parents are currently growing up with technological advances around them. The

criteria for informants are the millennial generation aged 20-40 years, have 2 to 3 different social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, spend 2-4 hours on Instagram a day, and at least have interacted through the comments column, like or share parenting educational content. In this study, the researcher uses data analysis techniques modified from the analysis techniques of Alfred Schutz and Stevick's thinking [8]. The analysis procedure to be carried out is as follows:

- Initial stage: the researcher fully describes the phenomena experienced by the research subjects. All recordings of in-depth interviews with research subjects were transcribed into text or written language.
- Horizontalization stage: the researcher takes an inventory of meaningful statements relevant to the topic from the transcription results. At this stage, the researcher must be patient to delay the assessment.
- Thematic Portrayal or Cluster of Meaning: The researcher groups statements into themes or units of meaning and discards repetitive statements. At this stage, the researcher also carries out the following stages: (a) Textural Description, which is to write down what someone experienced. (b) Structural Description, which is to write down how someone experiences the phenomenon. Researchers also examine various possible meanings based on the researcher's reflections in the form of opinions, judgments, and expectations of people who experience the phenomenon.
- Essence description: at this stage, the researcher begins to construct (build a description) the meaning and essence of the experience experienced by the individual.
- Researchers write research results. Reports give readers a better understanding of how a person experiences a phenomenon. Research reports show the existence of meaning from experience, where all experiences have an essential structure.

## 3 Literature review

### 3.1 Alfred Schutz phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a theory and a method. As a philosophy, phenomenology believes that knowledge exists in phenomena [9]. In addition, phenomenology is a measuring tool for obtaining knowledge about the nature of consciousness and unique types of first-person knowledge through forms of intuition.

Humans are social actors who develop continuously [10]. When living life, many meanings result from the experiences experienced and obtained by humans. According to Schutz's notes, as members of society, in understanding the meaning of actions, speech, and interactions, humans need to pay attention to three aspects: situation, typification, and motive: in order motives and because motives [11]. According to Schutz's phenomenology, the actions taken by social actors are based on two things [7]. Schutz classifies motives into two parts, namely because-motives and in-order-to motives:

- Because-motives are the conditions that underlie experience and cause actions or actions to occur [12]. Because-motives are conditions that underlie and influence people to take specific actions [7].
- In-order-to motives are goals based on past motives for future events [7]. Because-motives and in-order-to motives build relationships in the motivational relevance

chain. Because-motives play a role in constructing actions that are considered most important for individuals. Meanwhile, in-order-to motives originate from actions that are considered the most important and pre-existing [12].

- Schutz also believes that meaning is an experience experienced by social actors [7]. The meaning is contained in actions and correlated with aspects experienced by social actors or individuals [7]. According to Schutz, meaning also requires awareness of the experience. In Schutz's view, every action has a specific meaning to be reflected [7]. Life experience is not only about how the experience is experienced but also about the role of meaning in the experience [13]. Schutz defines experience through a social perspective, which states that individual experiences originate from social actions [14].

### **3.2 Principles of character designs**

Character design represents human nature or emotions made with a specific purpose. Visually, the character designs created must look like humans. While fundamentally, character design comes from acting that has been developed in such a way. Meanwhile, a holistic character design must have a soul of remarkable history, outlook on life, and dreams [15]. The second is characteristic, meaning that the character must have a unique body shape, face, and clothes so that it is easy to remember. The third is expressive, namely the way of speaking and behaving according to the characteristics of the character. According to Sopov [16] the following are the principles of character design that must be met by design:

- Silhouette, which is the outline of a character. Characters must have the uniqueness that makes them look different from existing characters. Silhouettes will also make the characters more recognizable.
- Basic shapes have different meanings according to the visual language displayed. Character design has three main basic shapes: squares, circles, and triangles. The basic shape of the box has a strong, sturdy, and masculine meaning. Circles represent positive and feminine shapes, while triangles represent movement and sharpness. The character will be more interesting if he uses contrasting basic shapes.
- Proportion can be determined through the ladder effect, meaning that the proportion can be adjusted to the nature that the character is trying to convey.
- Pose is helpful in emphasizing the other three-character principles so that the character seems alive and convincing. The pose must be clearly described in the sense that the pose does not have a double meaning. A good pose has a dynamic line of action. A line of action is an imaginary line that is the main action of the character [17].

## **4 Results and discussion**

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and observations that have been carried out with nine informants who follow parenting education accounts as research subjects. The following is a grouping analysis of the meaning of parenting formed after the parenting education account, starting from the reasons, motives, and meanings using the Thematic Portrayal.

Thematic Portrayal is the process of preliminary grouping information into several common themes. The grouped information is the core of the experience from recording important informants' statements (horizontalization), which consists of core themes representing the information and experiences conveyed. Based on this, the Thematic Portrayal in this study is grouped based on Because-Motives (Background, reasons for taking specific actions, past experiences, past orientation), In-Order-Motives (statements of goals, intentions, plans, hopes, interests, future), and grouping Meanings (statements of experiences experienced) as follows:

4.1 The reasons of following Gaia Parenting

This theme explains how informants choose to parent education accounts to follow and serve as a medium for young parents to learn about parenting and child health. From these themes, we want to explore and find out the reasons why the informants choose certain parenting education accounts to follow. The following table 1 are the reasons for informants choosing a parenting education account to follow:

Table 1. Reasons of following Gaia Parenting.

| Informant | FHN                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | FF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | NI                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reason    | “In the past, there was not much information about parenting, so our parents probably didn't understand. If I raise my children the way my parents do, my children will probably be like the old me, and I don't want that to happen. I felt that there were some painful things that my parents treated me with. I used to feel hurt when my parents educated me. So by following this parenting account, I can be even better for my children.” (Interview on 28 June 2022) | “Because from my previous experience, I didn't live with my parents, and I was only entrusted to be educated by my grandmother, I felt that I was not loved much. I want my child to be the best and better than me. I can educate in a better way” (Interview on 1 July 2022) | “Because my mother is a rather fierce person, I felt it had a bad effect on me. I grew up a coward, afraid to do many things, lacked confidence, and was timid. I don't want that to happen to my child. I want my child not to be like me, so I'm looking for a way so I can educate my child so that he grows confident and dares to make this decision and realize that the child should not be scolded violently to the point of hurting his heart, it is bad for the child.” (Interview July 1, 2022) |
| Keywords  | - Some painful things that are applied in parenting<br>- In the past, when my parents educated me, I felt hurt.<br>- By following the parenting education account, I hope that I can become a better parent                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | In the past, I did not live with my parents and was only entrusted to be cared for by my grandmother, and I felt less loved.                                                                                                                                                   | Because my mother is a rather fierce person, I felt that it hurt me, I grew up to be a coward, afraid to do many things, lacked confidence and was timid.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Theme     | Past Wounds                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Past Wounds                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Past Wounds                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

One of the reasons why followers of Gaia Parenting accounts choose to follow Gaia Parenting is because they feel that they received a lousy parenting pattern from their parents when they were young. With the events that have been experienced, they do not want their children to feel and get the same parenting pattern that they experienced as a child. So that by studying parenting and child health, they can educate their children properly and appropriately without hurting them. All three said that the parenting pattern they received as a child greatly affected their personality in the future.

4.2 Motives of following Gaia Parenting

This theme explains how the motives of new parents to follow parenting education accounts, most of which are because they want to provide the best care for their children so that they can grow up to be excellent and successful individuals in life. See table 2 below.

Table 2. Motives of following Gaia Parenting.

| Informant | FHN                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | FF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | NI                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reason    | “I have been following a parenting account since before I got married because I was interested in the world of education and parenting from the past, so I can treat my child better than my parents treat me” (Interview on 28 June 2022) | “I am the type of parent who prepares a child until he does not have a red flag and his development is good, taking advantage of the golden age because it affects him when he grows up. I try to be a good parent to my child, so I hope I don't hurt them and my children can be more independent, pious, religiously obedient, and morally awake. Having children and caring for them is not easy, so we need careful preparation so they can grow well.” (Interview July 1, 2022) | “If we don't learn how to do it, we will get confused later and often get angry with our children, and it will hurt them. Meanwhile, our behavior is seen by children and they will imitate us.” (Interview July 1, 2022) |
| Keywords  | Following parenting accounts before getting married, so I can treat my child better than my parents treat me                                                                                                                               | - Having children and caring for them is not easy, so we need careful preparation<br>- I try to be a good parent to my child, so I hope I don't hurt them                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | If we don't learn how to do it, we will get confused later and often get angry with our children, and it will hurt them                                                                                                   |
| Theme     | Readiness to have children in order to avoid giving a wounded inner child                                                                                                                                                                  | Readiness to have children in order to avoid giving a wounded inner child                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Readiness to have children in order to avoid giving a wounded inner child                                                                                                                                                 |

The motive for readiness to have children is to prevent injuries in parenting. According to them, being a parent is not easy, so they need much preparation in terms of material

and non-material aspects such as parenting. By having sufficient parenting knowledge, they hope that they will be better prepared to face all kinds of things that will happen when facing challenges in raising their children so that they can minimize worry because they already know what to do, even though, in reality, the theories parenting theory is not as easy as put into practice.

#### **4.3 The meaning of parenting style for new parents of Gaia Parenting followers**

Because of the reason to avoid having a wounded inner child and the motive of readiness to have children, they want to show that before having children, one must have thorough preparation including parenting education so that their hopes of being able to provide the best for children do not fail. This group of motives also shows that today's young mothers and fathers have faith in the values of parenting they profess. This shows the development in the parenting mindset that is formed in Indonesia today.

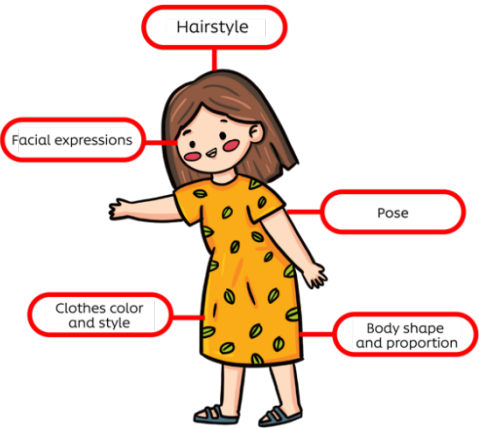
The values in their upbringing, such as having to eat real food, not using gadgets and reading books. In each of these groups, it was also found that they were always firm in their respective positions despite getting bad comments from others. Groups with this motive tend to know what is good and not good for them. In addition, they also know what to do in the future or are visionary types of parents. Thus, the informants interpreted the parenting pattern that was formed after following the Gaia Parenting educational account as a happy parenting pattern.

A happy parenting pattern is formed because the informants in this group, new parents both have a less pleasant background in parenting. Starting from the death of their parents so that the child must be cared for by relatives, to the harsh acceptance or treatment from parents that makes them become timid children and do not dare to decide what they want. In this group, the informants both want happiness for their children and want to protect the children in the hope that no child will feel the same way as him.

After identifying the meaning of parenting that is formed, we try to examine the visual character design that Gaia Parenting displays whether it is in accordance with the meaning and image formed by the audience.

#### **4.4 Visual analysis and meaning of Gaia Parenting's character design**

A good character design is a character that is designed based on a purpose. Therefore the design of character designs must go through good stages, starting from research, the design process, to production [18]. At this stage, an analysis is carried out to determine whether the character design of Gaia Parenting can form the same audience perception as what they mean. This sub-chapter describes the various elements that the designer wants to convey to the audience through the theory of character design principles. Four character design principles can create a distinctive visual sign language: silhouette, shape, proportion, and pose. See figure 2 below.



**Fig. 2.** The visual appearance of Gaia Parenting’s character designs.

The visual appearance of Gaia Parenting's character designs uses a simplified drawing style with thick outlines, a short brown hair cut, orange clothes, and a typical home dress pattern that mothers usually wear. The informants themselves interpret the visual appearance of the character design of the mother figure from the visual side as a figure that describes the real housewife and exists in real life. The selection of clothing attributes in the form of home dresses for mothers used in daily activities to support their comfort and mobility in caring for children and other work. Informants also reflected on themselves on the existing character designs because they felt similar to the characters shown, which makes them feel like the character is a close friend.

The character design figure displayed depicts a young mother who appears as she is with a cheerful expression. This is indicated by the attributes of the clothes worn, namely a home dress with orange color and leaf pattern, short flowing hair, and wearing sandals. Suppose it is related to the theory of holistic character design with a design approach. In that case, the character has a strong backstory, namely the figure of a mother who wants to show that she is a young mother who appears as she is by wearing a home dress. The home dress (daster) is a daily clothing item used by mothers in Indonesia. From this approach, it can be seen that the Gaia Parenting account wants young mothers to feel closeness and similarities with the character designs. This was also confirmed by the new parent's followers of Gaia Parenting, who said that the character designs from Gaia Parenting depicted him in his daily life as if the character designs from Gaia Parenting were also a depiction of his followers.

The orange color describes the personality traits of joy, fun, uplifting, warmth, and cheerfulness. In addition, in a study, the color orange is suitable for women's work clothes because the orange color can stimulate and increase the flow of oxygen to the brain, producing an energizing effect and increasing brain activity. Rustan is optimistic, which shows the nature and personality of the character design of the mother figure. Meanwhile, the image style seems simple, with cheerful facial expressions and average body proportions. Gaia Parenting's character design. See figure 3 below.



Fig. 3. Gaia Parenting character design poses and expressions.

4.5 Character design silhouette

Silhouette itself is an outline (general description) of a character. Characters must have the uniqueness that makes them look different from existing characters. Silhouettes will also make characters more recognizable. The Gaia Parenting character design silhouette can be identified as a female character with short hair, a body shape that is quite obvious, and whose poses can be skimmed and distinguished from other character designs. The Gaia Parenting character design can be recognized because it has a distinctive head shape and hair, which is shoulder-length short, and wears a home dress attribute shown quite clearly from the silhouette. See figure 4 below.



Fig. 4. Gaia Parenting character design silhouette.

#### 4.6 Character design shape

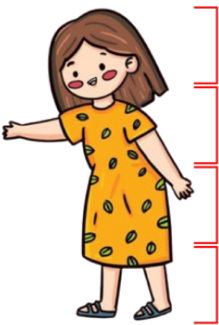
The second principle is shape. The shape of Gaia Parenting character design uses a circle shape. The circle itself represents a positive and feminine form. The shape used aims to convey that the mother figure's character design is a friendly, gentle, and loving figure. The appearance of the Gaia Parenting character design is also represented by using an orange home dress (daster) with leaf motifs that relate to the lives of mothers in Indonesia when carrying out activities at home. Daster forms a simple, accurate impression and is closely related to everyday life. Gaia Parenting aims to be a fun parenting account and can support a mother in raising her children. This is represented by a basic round shape, also interpreted as warmth, welcome and closeness [17]. See figure 5 below.



**Fig. 5.** Character design shape.

#### 4.7 Character design proportion

The proportion can be determined through the ladder effect, meaning that the proportion can be adjusted to the nature that the character is trying to convey. Proportions are usually calculated based on the size of the head. The proportion will tell about the personality of the character. Here are the body proportions of the Gaia Parenting character design. From the body proportions of the Gaia Parenting character design, it can be seen that the character design uses the proportions of four heads. This proportion is a general proportion usually used to describe the human figure. From this proportion, the Gaia Parenting character design shows a general personality. General personality is usually used in the main character (Lewis, 2018). The body proportions of the Gaia Parenting character design convey the meaning of openness, friendliness, and tenderness. See figure 6 below.



**Fig. 6.** Character design proportion.

**4.8 Character design poses**

The pose is useful for emphasizing the other three principles of the character so that the character seems alive and convincing. The pose must be clearly described in the sense that the pose does not have a double meaning. A good pose has a dynamic line of action. A line of action is an imaginary line that is the main action of the character [17]. The use of a line of action will add a dramatic impression to the character's design poses. Some examples of the visual appearance of Gaia Parenting's character designs can be seen in figure 7. A good and strong line of action usually has a curved line. The use a line of action can also use more than one line to provide visual balance. The Gaia Parenting character design pose itself has several poses that are often used. From the posts uploaded throughout 2021, there are three kinds of poses used, namely the standing pose with a slight bow, the sitting poses parallel to the child, and the snuggle pose. When viewed from the poses used, the Gaia Parenting character design does not represent a cheerful, free and active character design. This is because the poses are still limited. See figure 7 below.



**Fig. 7.** Character design poses.

The attractiveness of the character design is based on an assessment using four character design principles, namely silhouette, shape, proportion, and pose. The Gaia Parenting character design has a unique silhouette and can be distinguished from other character designs. The use of the basic circle shape represents a friendly, feminine, and warm impression. The attributes used are proven to reinforce the overall meaning of the visual language formed in the audience's mind and the purpose that the character design wants

to display. As a result, the meaning to be conveyed follows the meaning of parenting currently formed in the Gaia Parenting audience.

## 5 Conclusion

Identifying the meaning of parenting style constructed in new parents following the Gaia Parenting Instagram account is a happy parenting pattern. The character designs displayed are also following the meaning of happy parenting. This is represented by attributes and colors in the Gaia Parenting character design. Character designs also positively influence the audience to be more interested in following accounts and reading content. From this study, it can conclude that the similarity of their values influences someone following a parenting education account. Both in terms of visuals that relate to mothers and parenting values that align with what they believe. In addition, it is essential for designers to create character designs that have an emotional value that can provide customer satisfaction. When designing characters, designers must provide a personality that fits the image and similarities between self-concept and values held by the audience or consumers.

## 6 Suggestion

From the perceptions and meanings that the informants described, the researchers also found that there is an implied message that parenting is only the mother's responsibility. This is interpreted from the appearance of the character design of the mother figure, which is more dominant than the father in the Gaia Parenting account. This can be used as further research on why the father figure is less shown and why fathers are less interested in learning parenting education.

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