

## Social Media Use: It's Impact on Families and Parenting

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media has been seen as a powerful impact maker in the life of nearly everyone in our society. Social media is not only characterised as a communication medium; it has helped us in deepening our roles, perceptions, and understanding, by opening the doors of knowledge to and opportunities from various social media sites. In this tough time of the global pandemic of COVID-19, social media emerged as a boon to the education system and to other streams as well, where sharing of information and reaching the masses has become easier as an alternative source to physical meetings, thus highlighting the positive aspects of it. Social media impacts relationships in the family and the family system. Objective of this study: This paper will reflect on the social media prospects in detecting openness of family communications and developing collective family consciousness. Perceptions developed with social media work as a mediator in family ties, thereby developing or negating family ties and parenting skills. Therefore, there is a need to characterise the impact of technologies in the name of social media as an opportunity or a risk, so that it does not damage family relationships. This study will foster the perceptions about the potential impact and functional use of social media on family relationships.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Use of Technology, Family and Parenting Skills, Family Ties and Social Media, Family Efficacy, Open Communication*

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## INTRODUCTION

Family makes up those basic institutions of our society where socialisation takes place. Family represents a primary group where members are born, cultivated with culture, and trained, and socialise to associate themselves in various social roles and responsibilities. Social workers mainly study family in the context of personal values and acquaintances, socio-demographic variables, and hierarchical linear regression. Every individual is seen as a fragmented family, and families represent a complex social system where growth takes place (Broderick, 1993). According to the family system theory, the functioning of a family as a social system evolves through a process of interactions, whereby a family sets goals, sets rules for themselves, and takes decisions to meet their needs (Engaging theories in family perspective, multiple perspectives 2006). Family functioning is adequately managed if there is an open flow of communication and healthier interactions among its members. Mutual acceptance grows with open communication, which helps manage stress among adolescents; having logical negotiations among the members sets a tone of positivity for both the individuals and the family. Family with good communication channels are observed to have a higher level of understanding in handling their children and their daily concerns; their daily activities, which may be at the institutional level or at home; and their issues and health, which in turn makes them supportive parents within a family system level (A sociological model for family research and intervention, JD Lanigan, 2009).

The social cognitive theory describes the influence of individual experiences, their actions, and environmental factors on health behaviours of the individual. The perceived efficacy of the social cognitive theory is setting up a central role in managing different types of interactions and relationships within the family as a system, which helps in developing 'collective family efficacy' (Bandura, 1999). Collective family efficacy can be understood as a belief in the capabilities of the members in working together, in maintaining beneficial ties to promote each other, and in developing and maintaining the well-being of the individuals and the family as a system; this also exhibits resilience in adversity. Studies have reflected that families with higher family efficacy exhibit higher family satisfaction, more effective parental monitoring, and open communication, with a lower aggression management of conflicts and issues in communication. Maintaining such efficacy within the family

plays a very crucial role in managing issues that relate to parenting within families. It acts as a protective factor in generating healthier understanding and cooperation in the family as a system (Assessment of filial, parental, marital and collective family efficacy beliefs, European Journal of Psychological Assessment, pp. 247-261, 2004).

Social media can be evolutionary for adolescents facing information bombardment available to them just one click away. Social media use can be the central issue in families, in relation to the tasks, challenges, and phase of life to which the member belongs. Certain narratives also refer to this generation of evolving adolescents as Generation Media, as they spend a significant amount of time using social media that sets a sense of negotiation or autonomy among their peer relationships as well. Some of the most recent literature has generated a deep understanding of the social media impact on immature minds (Lambe, 2011). According to some latest data retrieved from the 'we are social Report', of Italy (2018), this new technology has more risks to offer than opportunities. Individuals spend countless hours on social media with the intent of communicating with new friends, sharing their happenings of everyday lives, or to acquire new information. Researches have shown that many accidents occurred on a regular basis with people who are engaged while texting on social media, and taking pictures and sharing on social networking sites. Plenty of cases are also seen, where parents are no longer in direct communication with their children, thereby decreasing family efficacy, resulting in distracted parenting. Children prefer to text their parents over face-to-face interactions; this may be because of the fast and engrossed lifestyle (Mc Daniel & Radesky, 2018). Likewise, it is also reported that social media is seen as a place to vent frustrations and to connect with other people in difficult situations. Therefore, *social media has taken the place of socialisation for children and for adults as well, as the new normal*. Social media is also demarcated as a threat to children (Ralston, 2012) who are often ignored by their parents, not receiving direct attention, or who require close support/supervision.

### **Social Media: Use within Family**

Social media has been a powerful impact maker in our lives over the years. According to Hertlein's multi-theoretical model, social media is capable of making ecological influences within families, with their social media features. It refers to changes that social media is capable of bringing in our family, with accessibility, acceptability, and accommodation among

the members of a family. The changes that social media influences within a family structure could be the redefinition of rules, adapting new social roles, boundaries for social functioning and inculcating new rituals, redefining intimacy, and newer ways of communication (Hertlein, 2012). This spread of a newer set of accessibility of social media has resulted in ambivalent perceptions of parents about their adolescent children, owing to new kinds of intimacy and communication rituals. Consequently, studies that consist of adolescents have also shown ambivalent results that range from increasing social connect/support, decreasing family cohesion/efficacy, and progressive isolation of family members within the same family structure (Jordan & Hersey, 2006).

Talking in terms of parenting within the family, on one hand, social media or the use of ICT allows parents to stay connected with their children, by allowing autonomy for learning, and creating opportunities and making plans in real time, while on the other hand, it ensures safety and security for their children in emergency situations. So, it can be seen as a means to strengthen family ties, as it may encourage parent-child interactions, facilitate discussions, promote understanding, and provide any-time access to their spaces online or their physical spaces (Edward & Huisman, 2012). Simultaneously, the family must also ponder over the connectivity with devices and social media in terms of time, space, and occasions where it is being accessed and allowed, and where perpetual communication should be modulated. Risk arising out of a lack of modulating social media devices within the family is termed as the phubbing phenomena (David & Roker, 2009), where a person is being ignored just to pay attention to the mobile devices.

In totality, arrangements have to be made to avoid a level of conflict or aggressiveness over communication, as social media has been seen as setting up the new norms, rules, and roles that affect the emerging adolescents' engagements and decision-making ability.

## **AIM OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY**

It has been acknowledged that the collective family efficacy is the result of perceptions about the family members on guiding and managing interactions, communications, and challenges that help in achieving positive outcomes in terms of open communication. There is widespread use of ICT and creating a new challenge that has to be managed by parents, with a new adaptation in beliefs, habits, and norms.

*Hypothesis:* Impact of social media use modulates the relationship in a family, in terms of their parenting behaviours, in relation to the perceived family efficacy, and openness in communication.

*Methodology:* Some literature surveys were done, along with a few case studies online; some telephonic interviews were also taken into consideration to analyse the impact of social media use. Snow ball sampling is used to conduct this study, with the parents of one or more teenage children or toddlers or school-going children. Attention was given to ethics, anonymity, and the privacy of the respondents. Literatures were not seen much in the Indian context and social media's impact on family and parenting; overall data, in terms of ideas, was taken mostly from secondary sources.

## SOME LITERATURE REVIEW

Ray and Jat (2010), in their book 'Effect of electronic media on children', elaborate that social media can create harmful impacts on immature minds, that is, those who are not able to distinguish between reality and the world of fantasy, when it is presented as real (p. 561). Children are more likely to be exposed to bullying, hate, or violence, when aggression culminates in them over time. A clinical report submitted by the American Academy of Pediatrics suggested that the intensity of the online world can be a reason to trigger a sense of depression among some evolving adolescents. Parents have a vital role to play to check the social media being used and the sites visited.

Fernandez (2011), in his paper 'The role of social media for patient and consumer health', describes the positive aspects of social media on children. He states that parental involvement in school activities is increased with the help of social media. It talks about Facebook as a social media utility that helps parents keep themselves updated regarding their children's activities and the sharing of information efficiently. It further elaborates that social media helps strengthen the bonds between the parent and the child, as the former can keep an eye on the latter's life events. This study mainly analysed the viewpoint of parenting, paying attention to the trends in social media and their current parental use.

Lueng and Lee (2005), in their study on 'Multiple determinants of life quality: The roles of activities, use of new media', elaborate that Internet activities diminish family and individual leisure time, as people find themselves "plugged in" more often than in face-to-face interactions,

which in turn affects the quality of relationships in their lives with their children. It suggested that social media use (Internet and computers) negatively affects the quality of life. Other findings of the study state that extra time and social support systems encourage positivity and improves quality of life.

Scott (2014), in his study on ‘Social media use and sleep quality among adults’, explains that adults are more inclined towards social media than children. This subsequently leads to inattention of parents towards their children, thus increasing incidences of anxiety, separation, and discipline resistance in children.

*Research Gap:* After going through the literature surveys, plenty of online studies, and interaction with families, it can be said that there are plenty of things that are ignored or talked about rarely when it comes to social media use and its impact on families and parenting. Many research gaps were noticed, viz., the impact of users and followers on social media, the craze factor of getting more likes and followers on social media, impact analysis of social media on different age groups, the positive and negative impacts of selective media sources, and the motivation behind sharing one’s social and personal life.

## **CASE STUDIES AND THEIR SUBSEQUENT ANALYSIS**

*Case 1:* Parents, both working in reputed positions, have left their teenage child with caretakers at home, when they are at their work stations. They respect each other’s jobs and positions; they have arranged child care and support system at home, which has majorly increased during this Covid pandemic. Since the child is continuously at home, and all education has shifted online, it has increased the screen time for the children and reduced physical movement of the child. While interacting with the parents, it was observed that they were majorly concerned about the child gaining weight as they were indoors all the time. Secondly, when a teenage child is allowed to access information on the Internet freely, they easily acquire and access false information, dating apps, and other online gaming or malicious apps. At this tender age they are not able to analyse their essence or any other importance; rather, they simply explore and get addicted to these apps. Thirdly, as reported by parents, plenty of online games, online courses, and other things have taken the place of physical activities. What becomes crucial is the management and use of social

media platforms. As parents they clearly see their ward's inclination move towards entertainment, such as watching videos and programmes online with the use of social media and networking sites.

*Case 2:* Parents were explaining that their ward was going to enter the final year of graduate school.

When he entered the graduation programme, Facebook was a brand new social media, and in the span of four years it has grown exponentially and has taken the mass connectivity of nearly every individual. Parents also expressed concern regarding the sharing of their life events online with the help of social media and updating everything online, which may include Facebook or other social media.

The major concern was how technology has taken over their lives, and they do not know how to manage conflicts and challenges arising from it, as this phenomena did not exist when they were adults or growing up. As parents they expressed their concern; at times it becomes hard to manage technology in our lives as there is no certain answer to some of the most pertinent questions, like what are the benefits, what will it cost, and when do we have to limit the time spent on it. There is no general answer for everyone. As parents they focused on the positive and the negative, and observed whether social media can be exploitative to the newer habits being created.

Many telephonic conversations were conducted with working parents and also with the families of teenagers. All the views that surfaced were incorporated in the above discussions. A major outcome of every interaction was how to limit and when to limit, and how to manage the use of social media. Social media is embedded in the life of every individual and it is able to have a powerful impact on them. Therefore, its management becomes crucial.

## **DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS**

Many of the technological advances have been through major contributions of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs; however, they themselves have not experienced this technological/electronic age when they were young. Some of the major inappropriate uses that parents seemed extremely concerned about were cyber bullying, sharing of videos/photos that may bring a feeling of regret after sharing, sexting, and so on; these are on the rise and reported even in the elementary age group. Parents explained their fear factor: children are not able to comprehend the long-term impact of

digital footprints, which may last forever. Researches are carried out on the addiction with the social media and electronic gadgets – like an obsession and incessantly for online engagements.

Referring to the study that had been carried out by the Kaiser Family Foundation on media influence, it had been reflected that 8-18-year-olds spend more than seven hours each day on social media, which is 50 hours per week. This simply means that they are not having any physical exercise or meeting with any people, and are negotiating with family relationships. Most of them are having difficulties in maintaining subtle ties with their family or negotiating in their personal relationships. Often, they seem mentally absent when they are sitting with in a group of people, and lack the sense to maintain relationships. As a result, they are gaining weight and their screen time is increased.

These electronic gadgets have taken the place of physical spaces; it is not only our children, but it is we who often pull out our mobile phones to check for messages. Figuring out how many times, we as adults, check our social media to see the latest notification, we can clearly see that these notifications are taking up much of our time. If we really consider, the time that we give to our electronic gadgets is a lot. While sitting at the dining table, a notification just chimes in, and we tend to check it first, instead of focusing on the food. It is not just our children. We often spend most of our time in capturing moments digitally, rather than what is taking place physically. Many of us just checked to a restaurant with a companion to the social media checked in with date, place and meal even, to a trend in social media device. Parents, on the other hand, are often seen investing time in making short videos or capturing the life events of their child for social media, instead of investing time in strengthening their ties with their children. Parents being involved in social media impacts the family negatively. Covering all the case studies, and also the face-to-face interactions with parents on the impact of social media use on parenting, it was clearly reflected that social media/technology was taking over their family/children. All that is required is managing social media usage. There is no perfect answer that suggests when social media use is enough or what can be done to control it. Based on the above discussion, we find that there is no specific line to draw.

Often, parents tell us that they feel that technology is taking over their family and/or children's lives, but they do not know when enough is enough, or what they can do to control it. Since there is no perfect answer or specific line to draw, we suggest parents engage in one principle that



can be written as follows:

Paying attention to the children, and of what social media they are accessing; seeking answers for as many questions as possible; and monitoring the changes and altering things you do not like to see or want them to see. Based on researches, case studies, and direct interviews, some questions, to check on the lifestyle changes, are listed as follows.

- Check the time that a child spends on electronics.
- Parents need to update themselves with the technologies or the type of social media their child is using.
- Try to acquaint yourself with the devices that your child is using. Try to understand the usage of the devices and how much time your child can indulge in social media.
- What could the learning opportunities of the child be? Might it be the child's development (mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual) that is neglected because of these experimental experiences?
- Any other areas of your child's development (physical, emotional, social) that is neglected because of electronic usage.
- Is electronic usage limiting your child's exploration into other aspects of life?
- Does electronic media interrupt family time interactions, as most people are engaged in social media?
- Generate an awareness of how screen time is affecting your child's mental faculties. Does that bring any positive change in the child's mood, remarkable change in aggressiveness, or withdrawal from physical activities?
- One must monitor the kind of messages that your child is exposed to with the help of social media; if you are not happy with what you are seeing, what small steps could you take to manage screen time for your family?

After a detailed analysis in limiting the screen time of the child, here are a few tips:

- Place a basket where the children are supposed to deposit their phones until they are done with their homework and dinner is over; you may also do the same, and pay attention to your child's activities.
- All electronic gadgets should be switched off at bedtime for a perfect sleep, and to avoid any temptation to chat or play games.
- For perfect timing and routine, keep the television and computers

in the public areas of your home.

- Parents have to be computer literate to monitor and block inappropriate sites.
- Bookmark your child's favourite sites to stop them from surfing. Teach Internet safety to your child, without revealing personal information.
- Talking about the pros and cons of the Internet with your child will surely help them understand how choices (impulsive or without considering the long-term effects) can impact our lives.
- Make your child learn it as a teaching opportunity to help them to set limits, and to develop self-control.
- Making such a family drama that generates cohesion compassion in the family and generates a discussion that how much it intersects with the family values event and culture.
- Try to engage your child in face-to-face conversations, despite them being connected to the digital world. Likewise, as a parent, limit your screen time so that your child will follow the same habit. Take every opportunity to engage your child in physical activities.

Unfortunately, this is not a topic you visit once and then say you are done. You might find the right balance for this stage of your child's life, but it is easy to slip into unwanted patterns if you do not stay focused along the way.

Consider marking your calendar for a few months from now and reevaluate how you are feeling about these topics again. Then continue that process on a regular basis to ensure that you are still happy with the balance, as your child grows and technology continues to advance.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, it is evident that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are profoundly changing the ways in which people behave and relate to each other, and creating conflicting perceptions about their impact. As they have become cultural practices embedded in everyday relationships, their contribution in creating richer and more complex patterns of interactions, including family life, cannot be ignored. However, whether the effects of these new forms of interactions on the functioning of family systems are positive or negative is still unclear, even more so when considering families with adolescents. Thus, with Facebook and Whatsapp being the most-used social media in the current scenario

for sharing information or propagating things, this study deepens the roles and perceptions of parents about the effect media can exert on the functionality within the family, specifically referring to the relationship between collective family efficacy and open communications within family systems with adolescents.

Some of the basic child and parenting tips required can be summarised as: the parenting capacity incorporates the child's basic care, ensuring safety, emotional warmth, required stimulation, and support from the family, guidance at the boundaries, and providing and sustaining a child with said boundaries. Child developmental needs are social presentation, family and social relationship, developing his/her identity, emotional and behavioural development, education, and health.

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