

The Impact of Social Media on Parent-child and Peer Relationships

Jiaqi Li

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, V5A 1S6, Canada

jla840@sfu.ca

Abstract. With the rapid popularization of digital media, forms of parent-child and peer interaction have changed significantly. This study analyzes the dual impact of social media on parent-child and peer relationships, focusing on its role in attachment formation and emotional interaction. The study found that social media had a positive effect in promoting the frequency of parent-child interactions, enriching family learning patterns, and strengthening peer support. However, the study also found that the conscious use of social media can cultivate deeper emotional bonds and collaborative skills, while over-reliance on social media may weaken face-to-face interactions and increase conflict. Through literature review and case analysis, this article explores these complex relationship dynamics and proposes practical suggestions for improving parent-child and peer relationships. These include guiding the use of digital media through collaboration between families, schools and society. For example, establishing usage rules, integrating digital literacy education, and promoting parent-child participation, so as to balance the needs of technology use and interpersonal interaction, thus providing a new perspective for understanding the complex impact of technology on modern interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Social Media, parent-child and peer relationships, attachment formation, emotional interaction.

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of global digitalization, more and more adolescents and children are spending a significant amount of time reading online on smart devices every day [1]. This trend is subtly changing their social patterns and emotional connections. Therefore, in an era when digital media has become an integral part of daily life, social media platforms' impact on interpersonal relationships is profound, especially in families and peer groups. The increasing popularity of social media platforms has reshaped the dynamics of parent-child and peer interactions, bringing with both opportunities and challenges. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of emotional attachment in these relationships, such as family security attachment related to mental health, and the role of emotional support among peers in cultivating resilience and problem-solving. However, the integration of digital media into these relationships brings complexities that have not been fully explored. For example, while digital tools can enhance educational collaboration and bridge generational gaps, they also have the potential to reduce the quality of face-to-face communication and promote negative social comparisons among peers. This study explores the dual impact of social media on parent-child attachment and peer relationships through a literature review approach, focusing on how different forms of digital media use shape emotional connections, attachment formation, and social interaction patterns. The study aims to suggest practical strategies for harnessing the benefits of digital media to foster relationships while minimising its negative effects.

2. Introduction to the research subjects

Parent-child attachment refers to an emotionally rich and mutually satisfying relationship between a child and his or her caregiver, usually referring to the child's emotional and psychological dependence on the primary caregiver [2]. Attachment theory was proposed by British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, who believed that in order to grow up emotionally healthy and develop in mental health,

children need to establish a caring relationship with their primary caregivers [2]. Based on this framework, parent-child attachment relationships can be divided into secure attachment and insecure attachment, among which insecure attachment includes avoidant attachment, ambivalent attachment, and disorganized attachment [3].

In secure attachment, children establish a stable emotional connection with their parents. Because of their dependence on their parents, children show loss when they leave, and show excitement and happiness when they return [4]. This attachment relationship is usually associated with good psychological adaptation and emotional health. Conversely, in insecure avoidant attachment, children tend to avoid and distance themselves from their parents and appear calm when their parents leave [4]. Additionally, in insecure ambivalent attachment, children display feelings of attachment when their caregivers leave, but express rejection and anger when they return [4]. This attachment style is often associated with anxiety, uncertainty, and over-reliance on emotional needs in children [3]. Finally, in insecure disorganized attachment, children's behavior is variable, often showing contradictory behavior and lack of clear direction [4].

In peer relationships, emotional support and recognition play an important role. Through listening, understanding and empathy, peers can provide psychological comfort and practical help to each other when facing challenges. This support can not only relieve anxiety and stress, but also provide individuals with the motivation to rethink and take action. In communication, peers can help each other understand the problem more clearly and find solutions through strategies such as exploring problems, expressing understanding, sharing similar experiences, and providing advice. For example, emotional support dialogue is a systematic interactive method, the first stage of which is "exploration"[5]. This stage helps the support seeker identify problems and deepen their understanding of their emotions and situations through asking questions [5]. The core of this dialogue method is to promote emotional expression and problem-solving through a structured communication process.

After understanding the seeker's problem, the supporter can provide advice and help the seeker take action to cope with the difficulty. This approach can not only relieve the seeker's anxiety, but also motivate action through specific solutions [5]. This process is particularly effective in peer relationships because peers often have a foundation of trust and mutual understanding, which makes it easier for advice to resonate and be acted upon. Additionally, peers who have had similar experiences can provide tailored advice that not only solves problems but also fosters a sense of emotional connection and solidarity. This unique dynamic in peer relationships enhances the effectiveness of emotional support and encourages both emotional relief and practical problem-solving.

3. The impact of social media on parent-child intimacy

As social media plays an increasingly important role in modern families, it has brought new opportunities and challenges to parent-child interaction.

On the positive side, social media provides multiple benefits for parent-child interaction. Firstly, social media provides an important bridge for learning collaboration between parents and children, especially in promoting interaction and emotional connection. Through online educational platforms and social networks, family members can participate in various learning activities together, such as completing online courses together, discussing reading materials, or watching educational videos, thereby increasing the frequency and quality of interaction. For example, during the COVID-19 epidemic, school closures and social isolation have posed great challenges to family life, and digital media has provided important support for children to continue learning and families to maintain emotional connections [6]. Parents can not only monitor their children's learning progress by participating in online courses, but also take the initiative to provide academic help or answer questions for their children. Social media plays a vital role in facilitating this process, providing opportunities for online learning communities, sharing educational resources, and real-time

communication. These interactions further improve the frequency and quality of family involvement in their children's education, helping them to gain a deeper understanding of their children's academic needs and psychological state, thereby establishing a closer emotional connection. For some low-income families, since parents guide their children to use technology almost as often as children guide their parents, learning technology supports interaction between family members [7]. According to Katz et al., technology use is integrated into the family's social development process, with approximately 53% of children helping their parents learn and use technology, and 77% of parents similarly helping their children learn technology [7]. Through these dynamic two-way learning processes, family members can develop social and technical skills while using technology together, and this interaction promotes the development of parent-child relationships and the strengthening of emotional bonds.

In addition, social media provides a new model for multi-generational interaction in the family. As differences in interests and cultural backgrounds between generations gradually emerge, common topics between parents and children often become limited, and social media creates new opportunities to bridge the generation gap. Studies have shown that family participation in technology activities is an important link in the development of children's social and technological skills at home and school [7]. On the one hand, parents can learn about current popular cultural trends through the content shared by their children on social media, while also observing their children's interests and potential skills. For instance, if a child shows an interest in a particular art form or academic field, parents can provide targeted support based on these clues, including relevant resources or suggestions. On the other hand, children can also learn about traditional culture or life wisdom from their parents' sharing. When children post their work on social media, immediate feedback and praise from parents can make children feel valued and effectively boost their self-confidence. Through such interactions, the communication channels between parents and children are more diversified, which can not only help family members build a deeper level of trust and understanding, but also create a supportive environment for children's interest development and self-growth.

However, excessive or inappropriate use of social media often poses challenges to parent-child relationships. On the one hand, technoference has had a significant negative impact on face-to-face parent-child communication, especially during the pandemic [6]. Although frequent use of digital media may increase technological communication between parents and children, it may also intensify parent-child conflicts [6]. In daily life, it has become increasingly common for parents and children to focus on their own screens during meals or family activities. Not only does this behaviour reduce the time available for quality interaction, but it also reduces the frequency and depth of emotional communication between them, gradually weakening the emotional bond between parents and children. More seriously, this long-term lack of communication can make children feel isolated and helpless, especially when they need emotional support or guidance. If parents fail to pay attention to their children's needs and emotions in a timely manner, or even oppose their desire to gain autonomy and establish close relationships with others, such as restricting or disapproving their use of social media as a platform for self-expression and social interaction, it may cause adolescents to experience emotional fluctuations and weaken their ability to establish close relationships with others [8]. Ultimately, the gradual fading of emotional connection between parents and children may have a profound negative impact on family relationships.

On the other hand, when adolescents use social media, they often regard it as a way to escape family conflict and pressure, which directly weakens their emotional connection with their parents. For example, the significant correlation between overall family stress and social media addiction shows that when there is ongoing conflict or dissatisfaction within the family, adolescents are more likely to relieve their emotions by indulging in social media, thereby reducing communication and interaction with their parents [8]. Moreover, this pressure often comes from mothers, because in most families, mothers usually bear more educational responsibilities, so they tend to regard academic problems as key factors and believe that any problems will have a negative impact on the future of adolescents [8]. This attitude may cause adolescents to feel lonely and disgusted, and to seek comfort

and recognition by indulging in social media instead of communicating directly with their parents. This pattern of behaviour weakens the interaction between parents and children, and further widens the emotional distance between them.

4. The impact of social media on peer relationships

Similarly, the use of social media has also had a complex and far-reaching impact on peer relationships. On the one hand, social media provides greater convenience and more opportunities for interaction between peers, on the other hand, it also inevitably brings negative effects.

On the positive side, social media provides young people with a wider range of channels for communication and increases social connections. Traditional social interaction is often limited by geographical location or school environment, while social media eliminates these limitations and enables adolescents to connect with peers with common interests around the world. This immediacy and flexibility are particularly beneficial to adolescents who have weak social skills or lack confidence in real life [9]. Not only that, social media also creates a window for teenagers to share their daily lives. By posting diaries, photos, or participating in common online activities, peers can learn about each other's life dynamics more frequently, thereby enhancing relationships. These strengthened relationships may, in turn, contribute to the improvement of social skills over time. For example, friends who may reduce face-to-face communication in real life due to busy studies or activities can stay in touch through social media. This connection not only makes up for the lack of offline interaction, but also further deepens the emotional bond between each other, thus demonstrating that sufficient communication opportunities and time are key factors in optimizing peer relationships. It can be seen that social media provides important support for maintaining and deepening peer relationships among teenagers by breaking the time and space limitations of traditional social interaction.

In addition, social media has become an important tool for maintaining adolescents' social lives and expanding their social networks. When offline social interactions were interrupted due to epidemic prevention measures, the instant messaging and video calling functions of social media played a key role. The use of the Internet supports peer interactions and ongoing activities such as school teaching [10]. Social media platforms connect people through internet networks and provide them with a variety of verbal or visual communication methods, thereby promoting the realization of instant connections and interactions [10]. For instance, online collaboration tools such as VooV or Zoom are not only used for social entertainment, but also provide students with opportunities for joint learning and discussion. In this process, adolescents have developed the ability to work in teams and support each other through collaboration and interaction, which to some extent alleviates the sense of isolation caused by the interruption of offline interactions. The flexibility of social media is also reflected in the sharing and collaboration of learning resources. Teenagers use social media for group learning and encourage collaboration by sharing learning materials, problem solving and discussions. This form of collaboration not only improves learning efficiency, but also increases interaction and trust among peers, while motivating students who are relatively silent in class to participate more actively. In addition to maintaining a social life with classmates and friends, teenagers also interact with like-minded strangers by joining interest groups, fan communities, or online forums. For example, teenagers who love playing games may meet other gamers through platforms. Therefore, whether in maintaining daily social relationships or promoting learning collaboration, social media provides important support for adolescents and becomes an indispensable tool in their social lives.

Nevertheless, these positive effects also depend on the correct use and management of the platform, otherwise they can backfire. For example, social media can easily intensify comparison and competition among peers. This phenomenon is closely related to the transformation framework proposed by Nesi et al., which emphasizes that the characteristics of the social media environment have reshaped adolescents' peer experience by adjusting the frequency or immediacy of interaction, broadening the range of needs, changing the characteristics of interaction quality, and providing

opportunities for complementary or novel behaviors [11]. Specifically, because adolescents are particularly sensitive to the "popularity" of their peers on social media, some people will choose to post photos during periods when their peers are more active online in order to get more likes, fans, and comments [11]. This comparison of appearance creates an online atmosphere that may undermine body image acceptance and easily lead them to compare themselves with models who are more likely to attract users [10]. Thus, when teenagers do not receive the expected number of likes on photos posted on social platforms, they may feel that they are not accepted by their peers. This constant pursuit of social approval is likely to undermine adolescents' self-esteem and may also trigger jealousy, leading to strained or even broken peer relationships.

Over-reliance on social media can reduce the quality of face-to-face interactions with peers. For instance, some students prefer to discuss problems with classmates through chat software rather than face-to-face. Although online methods have improved the convenience of communication to a certain extent, long-term online communication may have changed the way individuals deal with interpersonal relationships, making them more inclined to rely on text or simplified symbols to express themselves, rather than conveying emotions through rich non-verbal signals such as tone, expression, and body language [9]. This communication method that relies on a virtual environment may weaken individuals' social abilities in face-to-face communication, such as insufficient empathy and emotional resonance when dealing with conflicts, thereby increasing the risk of misunderstandings and conflicts. This also explains why most people still prefer face-to-face communication in important private conversations, because this form can make up for the lack of emotional transmission in a virtual environment [9]. Therefore, the popularity of virtual communication has not only changed the interaction pattern between people, but also posed new challenges to the depth and quality of social relationships. Therefore, there are indeed some examples in Tuan's study that reflect that virtual interactions can increase the risk of misunderstandings and conflicts, further challenging the stability of peer relationships [9]. The study surveyed 125 college students aged 18 to 21 through questionnaires and interviews, asking them to recall and report specific situations they had experienced in social media interactions. These students said that due to the limitations of expression in social media, such as the brevity of text messages or the ambiguity of emoticons, the recipients of the information often cannot accurately understand the sender's intentions and emotions, which leads to unnecessary disputes and emotional conflicts. The results show that these misunderstandings in virtual interactions not only affect the individual's emotional experience, but may also further weaken the stability of peer relationships, especially in the case of frequent interactions but lack of in-depth communication. Not only that, the virtualization tendency of social media may also lead to the alienation of adolescents from the real world. For example, during the epidemic, although social media helped teenagers maintain a certain degree of social connection, when offline activities gradually resumed, some teenagers found it difficult to adapt to face-to-face communication scenarios. This negative effect not only affects their intimacy with peers, but also has potential damage to their overall interpersonal skills, especially in scenarios that require establishing and maintaining stable peer relationships.

5. Discussion and suggestions

This study shows that moderate use of digital media provides important opportunities for the development of interpersonal relationships, but its excessive or inappropriate use also brings significant challenges.

In terms of parent-child relationships, digital media provides a new path for educational collaboration and emotional communication among family members. Online education platforms and social networks support parents and children to participate in learning activities together, and further promote emotional connections within the family through sharing resources and interaction. In addition, digital technology also bridge the intergenerational gap. However, the study also pointed out that inappropriate use of digital media might weaken the frequency and quality of face-to-face

communication, leading to weakening of emotional attachment and increased parent-child conflict. For example, the phenomenon of "technoference" is becoming more and more common, and family members are addicted to screens, resulting in less interaction time and affecting the timeliness and depth of emotional support.

In terms of peer relationships, the use of social media provides adolescents with a wide range of social opportunities, especially when geographical restrictions and time constraints are broken. Peers can share their daily lives, express emotions and conduct collaborative learning more frequently through social media, thereby strengthening emotional bonds. However, excessive reliance on social media may lead to increased social comparison, and some teenagers may suffer from damaged self-esteem due to excessive attention to the number of likes and followers. Moreover, the rise of virtual communication may weaken teenagers' empathy and emotional resonance in face-to-face communication, and even increase the risk of misunderstanding and conflict.

In summary, the use of digital media shows its complexity in promoting and challenging interpersonal relationships. Therefore, this study proposes the following suggestions to balance the use of digital media. Firstly, families and schools should actively guide adolescents to reasonably allocate the time of digital media use and avoid over-dependence on it. By setting clear rules, such as setting a daily screen time limit, and encouraging adolescents to combine digital media use with offline activities, the quality of face-to-face communication can be guaranteed while promoting familiarity with technology. Secondly, in order to mitigate negative effects such as social media addiction or the impact of social comparison, schools should incorporate digital literacy education into the curriculum system and teach adolescents how to protect their mental health and interpersonal relationships in the digital media environment. This includes cultivating adolescents' ability to identify and manage social comparisons, as well as dealing with misunderstandings or conflicts that may arise in virtual interactions. Furthermore, parents can participate in digital media activities with their children, such as watching educational videos and participating in online courses together. While guiding their children to use technology, parents can also learn from their children's use of technology. This two-way learning model helps to enhance trust and understanding between family members.

Although this study has explored the impact of digital media on interpersonal relationships in depth, there are still some issues that deserve further research.

First of all, from a cross-cultural perspective, there may be significant differences in the use of digital media and the impact on interpersonal relationships in different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, focusing on individual differences can deepen the understanding of the complexity of technology and interpersonal relationships. Differences among individuals in age, gender, socioeconomic status, and psychological characteristics, such as self-control, social anxiety, and loneliness, may lead to different susceptibilities to the motivations and effects of digital media use. Thus, future research can combine individual characteristics for detailed analysis to reveal the different needs and challenges of different groups in digital media use.

Through in-depth research from a cross-cultural and individual differences perspective, people can further enrich their understanding of the complexity of digital media and interpersonal relationships in order to better manage the complex impact of digital media on interpersonal relationships.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on the dual impact of digital media on parent-child and peer relationships, comprehensively analysing its complex role in emotional attachment and interaction patterns. Through a literature review, it is found that the appropriate use of digital media can promote parent-child educational collaboration, bridge the generation gap, and enhance emotional support and social skills among peers. However, excessive or inappropriate use can reduce face-to-face communication, weaken emotional attachment, damage self-esteem and increase conflict through social comparison. Based on the research findings, this paper makes a number of suggestions, such as encouraging families and schools to work together to guide young people towards a balanced use of digital media,

encouraging schools to strengthen digital literacy education for young people, and encouraging families to grow together. These suggestions aim to help individuals maintain and strengthen the quality of interpersonal relationships while enjoying digital convenience. Overall, the research significance of this paper lies in providing practical suggestions for understanding the impact of digital media on modern families and adolescent social dynamics, which not only enriches existing research, but also provides a reference for formulating policies and educational practices to promote healthy interpersonal relationships. Future research can further explore the impact of digital media on interpersonal relationships under different cultural and individual differences to expand the application prospects in this field.

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