

Watching social media and its impact on children's family communication: field study



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Abstract

The current study aims to reveal the impact of watching social media on children's family communication, as a field study in the city of Ain El Melh, where the study sample consisted of 30 families of children who were chosen randomly. Based on that, we are trying through this study to answer the following general question:
- To what extent does watching social media affect children's family communication? Which includes the following sub-questions:
- To what extent does social media time affect children's family communication?
- To what extent does frequent viewing of social media affect children's family communication?
- To what extent does the absence of parental control over the quality of programs viewed affect children's family communication?

Keywords

Programs;
Social networking;
Communication;
Family.

الكلمات المفتاحية

برامج؛
شبكات اجتماعية؛
تواصل؛
عائلة.

المناعة التنظيمية وعلاقتها بالثقافة التنظيمية (دراسة ميدانية)

ملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن أثر مشاهدة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التواصل الأسري لدى الأطفال، حيث أجريت دراسة ميدانية في مدينة عين الملح، حيث تكونت عينة الدراسة من 30 عائلة من الأطفال تم اختيارهم عشوائياً. وبناء على ذلك نحاول من خلال هذه الدراسة الإجابة على السؤال العام التالي:
- إلى أي مدى تؤثر مشاهدة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التواصل الأسري لدى الأطفال؟ والتي تتضمن الأسئلة الفرعية التالية:
- إلى أي مدى يؤثر وقت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التواصل الأسري للأطفال؟
- إلى أي مدى يؤثر كثرة تصفح وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على التواصل الأسري للأطفال؟
- إلى أي مدى يؤثر غياب الرقابة الأبوية على جودة البرامج المعروضة على التواصل الأسري لدى الأطفال؟

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Introduction:

Our world today has transformed into a global village, thanks to the immense advancements in communication and media technologies, which have brought nations and cultures closer and enhanced interactions among people. These developments have significantly impacted individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes.

The mobile phone is one of the most influential media tools due to its accessibility and ease of use. According to Okasha (1995), children are among the most frequent consumers of media, especially content designed for them. American children aged 2 to 11 reportedly spend around 26 hours per week, averaging three and a half hours daily, in front of media screens like television. Al-Adawi (2010), referencing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), states that Arab children spend approximately 22,000 hours annually on screens, with various media channels now supplementing traditional television. In comparison, children only spend around 14,000 hours in classrooms.

I.1. Problem Statement:

In light of the rapid digital revolution and the unprecedented spread of social media, these platforms have become an integral part of individuals' lives, especially children. With social media taking on a major role in children's leisure time, clear effects of these platforms on family relationships have begun to emerge. Children now spend extensive time in front of screens, interacting with digital content more than with their family environment, which may lead to weakened communication with family members and impact the quality of family relationships.

This study aims to understand the nature of this influence, addressing the issue of how children's exposure to social media affects family communication, and whether these platforms contribute to children's isolation from their family environment and alter their interactions with family members. The study also explores the role of parental monitoring in managing children's use of these platforms, and how such oversight can help mitigate potential negative effects and enhance family communication.

I.2. Study Hypotheses:

I.2.1. General Hypothesis:

- Social media usage affects family communication among children.
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I.2.2. Specific Hypotheses:

- The amount of time children spend on social media impacts family communication.
- Frequent exposure to social media affects family communication for children.
- Lack of parental supervision over the type of media content watched influences family communication among children.
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I.3. Importance of the Study:

- To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is among the first local studies addressing the impact of social media consumption on family communication in children.
- The study aims to provide insights and recommendations that could help strengthen family communication for children.

I.4. Study Objectives: The study aims to:

- Explore the impact of the time spent on social media on family communication among children.
- Examine the influence of frequent social media usage on family communication for children.
- Assess how the absence of parental monitoring over content affects family communication among children.

II. The theoretical aspect of the study

II.1. Social Media:

II.1.1. Communication - Linguistic Definition:

Al-Fayoumi (2000) defines communication as "connecting one thing with another to form a continuous link, which is the opposite of separation. Continuous connection implies an unbroken link."

II.1.2. Social Media Networks:

According to Radi (2003), social media networks are a system of electronic networks that allow participants to create a personal profile, which can then connect through an electronic social system with other members who share similar interests or hobbies or to reconnect with friends from school or university.

II.1.3. Operational Definition of Social Media Networks:

Social media networks are a collection of electronic platforms that facilitate communication among individuals within the same country or globally. These platforms often gather young people with shared interests or hobbies, allowing them to engage and interact around common topics or activities.

II.1.4. Social Media Platforms:

As Radi (2003) describes, social media platforms are electronic networks that enable users to create a personal profile and connect within an electronic social system with others who share similar interests and hobbies, or to reunite with friends from university or high school.

II.1.5. Advantages of Social Media Platforms:

- **Opportunities for Youth to Express Their Ideas:** In the interconnected world of social media and blogs, it is easier than ever for individuals to voice their thoughts and gather like-minded people from around the globe.
- **Support and Sharing Experiences:** Research suggests that simply sharing personal challenges and hearing how others have navigated similar issues can provide valuable support and help individuals cope more effectively.
- **Job Opportunities and Self-Marketing:** According to recent statistics, social platforms now feature over 6.5 million job postings, with LinkedIn serving as an example of a professional social media platform that connects job seekers with employers globally. Additionally, "social marketing skills" have emerged, allowing individuals to use social media and blogs to showcase their skills and document work accomplishments.
- **Expanding Opportunities for Innovative Ideas:** Social media has become a vital tool for major companies, entrepreneurs, and individuals with new ideas to market their products and services, a practice often referred to as digital marketing.
- **Creating New Job Roles and Career Paths:** The rise of new roles, such as content writers, social media marketers, and graphic designers for digital ads, has opened both full-time and freelance opportunities, particularly for youth.
- **Staying Connected with the World:** Previously, it was challenging to maintain contact with friends and family in different locations, but social media now enables continuous communication worldwide, providing a space for work and information exchange.

II.1.6. Disadvantages of Social Media Platforms:

- **Addiction:** Business Insider highlights that many, especially teens aged 13–18, spend around 9 hours daily on social media, often more than time spent on sleep or meals. Such prolonged use can disrupt other life aspects, with family, work, and study time unconsciously sacrificed, impacting focus and increasing mental distraction.
- **Social Isolation and Virtual Interaction Illusion:** It is common to see family members in the same house communicating through screens or spending hours on their phones without real interaction, which can hinder positive social and professional development.
- **Comparison and Perceptions of Affluence:** Many users showcase only the positive or idealized aspects of their lives, leading others, particularly those who frequently follow influencers, to feel discontent and discouraged.

Given these positives and negatives, it is essential to focus on using social media thoughtfully to enhance both personal and professional life quality.

II.1.7. Guidelines for Using Social Media More Effectively in Personal and Professional Contexts:

Understanding the growing influence of social media, including in the job market, here are some effective usage tips:

- **Avoid Excessive Comparison:** Keep comparisons positive and motivating rather than leading to discouragement or frustration.
- **Maintain a Professional Online Presence:** Avoid engaging in arguments or making posts that may create a negative impression, as these can be misrepresentative of your true self.
- **Engage with Quality Content:** Creating written, visual, or audio content can attract interest, generate opportunities, and personally enrich your knowledge.

- **Keep Professional Profiles Updated:** Profiles on LinkedIn, Bayt.com, and similar sites should be polished, balanced, and free of errors.
- **Use Social Media to Connect with Influencers:** Connect with those who can support your ideas and goals, and focus on building a network that aligns with your objectives.
- **Balance Online and In-Person Interaction:** Besides virtual connections, prioritize direct communication with family and friends to benefit from the irreplaceable positives of face-to-face interaction

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II.2 Family Communication:

II.2.1. Definition of Family:

Murdock defines family as “a social unit characterized by a shared residence, economic cooperation, and a reproductive function. It includes at least two members with a recognized sexual relationship by the society, and consists minimally of an adult male, an adult female, and a child, either biologically or through adoption” (Atif, 1971, p 165).

II.2.2 Concept of Communication:

Communication is often viewed as a reciprocal relationship between two parties, leading to interaction and a dynamic, mutual connection between them (Zaytoun, 1997, p 307).

II.2.3. Family Communication and Interaction:

Family communication encompasses interactions between two (e.g., spouses) or multiple members (e.g., parents and children). At its best, it involves a unity among family members, promoting shared language and common values. In father-child relationships, wise fatherhood is essential to psychological and social development, guiding children’s behavior and encouraging social skills through advice, positive role modeling, and appropriate discipline. It also raises children’s aspirations by motivating them to pursue tasks suited to their abilities.

Mother-child communication characterized by warmth, encouragement, and support fosters traits like independence, sociability, and self-confidence. On the other hand, communication that is distant or lacking encouragement can lead to poor social adjustment and lower psychological resilience.

Sibling relationships also play a crucial role. Harmonious sibling interactions, free from favoritism, hostility, or jealousy, support each child’s well-being and growth. Conversely, perceived favoritism by parents can lead to aggressive responses, resentment, and sibling conflict.

Family communication takes various forms or types, among which the most notable are:

Types of Family Communication:

- **Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication:**

This type includes spoken and written language, as well as gestures, silence, smiles, and listening. Verbal communication, one of the oldest methods of interaction, requires expressive skill from the sender and has the following benefits:

- Strengthens family bonds and nurtures positive relationships, encouraging focused attention and active listening.
- Breaks down barriers between family members.
- Helps individuals express and share emotions and perspectives.
- Provides insights into each family member’s personality.
- Saves time by delivering clear messages efficiently.

Written communication, on the other hand, is valuable for:

- Serving as legal documentation that conveys details that might be challenging to express verbally due to personal, family, or psychological reasons.
- Being less susceptible to distortion or alteration.

Non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language, offer unique advantages:

- They convey emotions and thoughts honestly and without hesitation.
- Reveal underlying emotions through facial expressions, eye movements, and posture, conveying messages like shyness, honesty, doubt, respect, refusal, and anxiety.
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- **Formal and Informal Communication:**

Formal communication refers to interactions that occur within established channels, at specific times and places, while informal communication is based on the nature of relationships among family members. Informal communication is generally beneficial as long as it does not distort information, thus ensuring accuracy and effectiveness.

In summary, healthy family communication, filled with love, kindness, and respect, fosters mutual affection and supports positive interactions among family members (Brou & Maouch, 2013, p 12).

II.2.4. Family Communication Tools:

To avoid familial and educational issues arising from weak or absent communication, strong and sincere communication is crucial. Dr. Mohamed Bouloz, a researcher in religious and educational affairs, emphasized in an interview with *Al-Muslim* website the importance of establishing robust family communication to fulfill the genuine needs of all family members. Bouloz identifies initial steps to strengthen family communication, including:

- Treating each other kindly and avoiding blame, complaints, or criticism during interactions.
- Fulfilling responsibilities before seeking rights, where parents fulfill their obligations to their children, children respect their duties toward parents, and spouses honor their roles to each other.

Bouloz also highlights additional methods for communication, such as:

- Fostering a religious and ethical foundation within the family.
- Regular reminders of values, like encouraging prayer together, guiding attire choices, and nurturing general etiquette.
- Supporting children's education by engaging in activities like Quran study, reviewing lessons, and sharing life experiences. (Thabet, 2013, p 13).

III. Study Methodology and Procedures

III.1. Study Boundaries:

The boundaries of this study are as follows:

- **Subject Boundaries:** The study focuses on examining the impact of television program viewing on children's family communication.
- **Human Boundaries:** The study was limited to a random sample representing families with children.
- **Geographical Boundaries:** The study tool was applied in Ain El Melh, M'sila Province.
- **Temporal Boundaries:** The study was conducted in June 2024.

III.2. Study Methodology:

This study utilized the descriptive-analytical method, which, according to Lamoureux (1995), "enables the researcher to provide an accurate portrayal of the phenomenon as it exists in reality, establish relationships among its various elements, and go beyond mere data collection to analyze, interpret, and draw conclusions that can contribute, in one way or another, to improving and developing reality" (Maamari & Ben Zahy, 2014, p 50).

III.3. Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of 40 families with children, selected randomly.

III.4. Study Tool:

The study adapted a questionnaire initially developed by Skimi and Haboussi (2013) for analyzing television program viewing, modified to examine social media usage. This tool consists of 16 items in various formats and uses a three-point Likert scale for responses: "Often" (2), "Sometimes" (1), and "Rarely" (0).

Psychometric properties of the tool were calculated on a sample of 10 families, with the following reliability results:

Table .1. Cronbach's Alpha for Social Media Viewing Scale

Significance Level	Sample Size (n)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
0.05	10	0.78

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

- **Reliability of the Social Media Viewing Scale:** The reliability of the scale was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.78, indicating strong reliability.
- **Validity of the Social Media Viewing Scale:** Construct validity was assessed through self-validity, calculated as the square root of the reliability coefficient, resulting in 0.88, which suggests the scale is valid in measuring the intended construct.

Additionally, the **Family Communication Scale** developed by Emara (2015) was utilized, consisting of 62 items in various formats, rated on a three-point Likert scale with "Always" (2), "Sometimes" (1), and "Never" (0).

Psychometric properties of this tool were also verified on a sample of five families:

Table .2. Cronbach's Alpha for Family Communication Scale

Significance Level	Sample Size (n)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
0.05	10	0.71

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

- **Reliability of the Family Communication Scale:** Cronbach's Alpha yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71, indicating the scale is reliable.
- **Validity of the Family Communication Scale:** Self-validity, computed as the square root of the reliability coefficient, was 0.84, confirming the validity of the scale in measuring family communication accurately.

III.5. Study Procedures:

The researcher administered the scales by distributing 30 copies to families with children, all of which were returned and deemed suitable for statistical analysis.

III.6. Statistical Methods Used:

To address the research questions and test the hypotheses, both descriptive and analytical statistics were applied. Data was coded and entered into SPSS version 22, utilizing the following methods:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To describe the study sample and highlight its characteristics using mean values, standard deviations, and ranking each variable's items in descending order.
- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient:** To determine the strength of the relationship between variables.
- **Linear Regression Analysis:** To assess the suitability of the study model and determine the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

IV. Presentation and Analysis of Study Results

IV.1. First Hypothesis: There is a Correlational Relationship between Time Spent Watching Social Media and Family Communication Among Children

Table .3. Correlation Coefficient between the Variables

Precision in Predicting the Dependent Variable	Correlation Coefficient (R)
0.72	-0.81

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table .4. Linear Regression Analysis

Significance Level (Sig)	B Value	
0.00	1.214	Regression Intercept (B_0)
	0.921	Regression Slope (B_1)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Using SPSS, a linear regression and correlation analysis were conducted at a 0.05 significance level, with "time spent watching social media" as the independent variable and "family communication among children" as the dependent variable.

- As shown in Table (3), the correlation coefficient $R = -0.81$, indicating a strong negative correlation between the two variables. This suggests that an increase in time spent watching social media correlates with a decrease in family communication.
- The precision in predicting the dependent variable is 0.72, meaning that 72% of family communication among children is accounted for by the time they spend watching social media.

In Table (4), the regression values show:

- The intercept $B_0 = 1.21$, representing the constant in the linear equation $Y = B_0 + B_1X$.
- The slope $B_1 = 0.92$ for the independent variable (time spent watching social media) shows the degree of change in family communication with each unit increase in social media time.

Since the significance level is 0.00, which is below 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, confirming the correlation between time spent on social media and family communication among children. Thus, the regression equation is: $Y = 1.21 + 0.92X$

This supports the hypothesis that there is indeed a correlational relationship between time spent watching social media and family communication among children.

IV.2. Second Hypothesis: Excessive Social Media Viewing Affects Family Communication Among Children

Table .5. Correlation Coefficient between the Variables

Precision in Predicting the Dependent Variable	Correlation Coefficient (R)
0.692	-0.74

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table .6. Linear Regression Analysis

Significance Level (Sig)	B Value	
0.00	0.971	Regression Intercept (B₀)
	1.120	Regression Slope (B₁)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

Using SPSS, a linear regression and correlation analysis were performed at a 0.05 significance level, with "excessive social media viewing" as the independent variable and "family communication among children" as the dependent variable.

- Table (5) shows the correlation coefficient $R=-0.74$, which indicates a strong negative correlation. This suggests that increased social media viewing is associated with a reduction in family communication among children.
- The precision in predicting the dependent variable is 0.692, meaning that 69.2% of the variation in family communication among children is accounted for by the extent of their social media viewing.

In Table (6), the regression analysis shows:

- The intercept $B_0=0.971$, representing the constant in the linear equation $Y=B_0+B_1X$
- The slope $B_1=1.120$ for the independent variable (excessive social media viewing) indicates the rate at which family communication changes with each unit increase in social media time.

The significance level is 0.00, below the threshold of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which confirms a relationship between excessive social media viewing and family communication among children. Thus, the regression equation becomes: $Y=0.97+1.12X$

This supports the hypothesis that excessive social media viewing negatively impacts family communication among children.

4.3. Third Hypothesis: Parental Control Over Program Content Affects Family Communication Among Children

Table .7. Correlation Coefficient between the Variables

Correlation Coefficient (R)	Precision in Predicting the Dependent Variable
0.71	0.819

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table .8. Linear Regression Analysis

Significance Level (Sig)	B Value	
0.00	1.301	Regression Intercept (B₀)
	0.992	Regression Slope (B₁)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Using SPSS, a linear regression and correlation analysis were performed at a 0.05 significance level, with "parental control over program content" as the independent variable and "family communication among children" as the dependent variable.

- Table (7) shows the correlation coefficient $R=0.71$, indicating a strong positive correlation, suggesting that increased parental control over program content is associated with an improvement in family communication among children.
- The precision in predicting the dependent variable is 0.819, meaning that 81.9% of the variation in family communication can be attributed to parental control over the type of programs watched.

In Table (8), the regression analysis shows:

- The intercept $B_0=1.301$, representing the constant in the linear equation $Y=B_0+B_1X$.
- The slope $B_1=0.992$ for the independent variable (parental control over program content) indicates the rate at which family communication changes with each unit increase in parental control.

The significance level is 0.00, which is below the threshold of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, confirming a relationship between parental control and family communication among children. Thus, the regression equation is: $Y=1.30+0.99X$

This supports the hypothesis that parental control over program content positively impacts family communication among children.

V. Conclusion:

The addiction to watching social media has become a concerning and widespread phenomenon, particularly among children, making them susceptible to the influence of these platforms and their content. This impact is evident in children's daily lives and in their family and social relationships, as they often try to emulate the heroes and characters they see on these platforms. Consequently, their engagement with this virtual world can detract from real-life family connections. This was confirmed by our current study, which allows us to make several recommendations:

- Pay close attention to children's physical and psychological development needs at various stages.
- Carefully select and monitor the communication platforms accessible to them.
- Continuously guide and advise children without resorting to authoritarianism, threats, or violence.
- Place communication devices in common areas within the home and avoid isolating children during use.
- Fill children's free time with diverse and beneficial activities, choose appropriate programs for them, and limit viewing time.

These measures can help mitigate the effects of social media on children and foster healthier family communication.

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