



Social Media Usage Affects Family Communication Among Chinese Adolescence

Ng Jia Ling¹ , Tilagavati Subramaniam² , Noor Eleena Nordin³

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Corresponding Author(s):

Ng Jia Ling

Faculty of Social Sciences, Quest International University, Ipoh Perak, Malaysia:
thaya.tilaga@gmail.com

Abstract The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of social media usage on family communication among Chinese adolescents. The research specifically aimed to understand the frequency of social media use among this group and how it affects their interactions with family members. The study employed a qualitative research approach, gathering data through in-depth interviews with seven Chinese adolescents. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings indicate that Chinese adolescents spend more time interacting with friends and engaging with social networks online than communicating with their families. Many adolescents seek mentoring, advice, and emotional support from online friends rather than from family members. The study also found that the personalities of adolescents play a significant role in hindering effective family interaction and communication, with social media usage exacerbating these challenges. In conclusion, the study suggests that social media significantly impacts family communication among Chinese adolescents, often leading to reduced face-to-face interactions within families. The implications of this research highlight the need for further studies to explore the perspectives of both parents and adolescents on social media use and its effects on family dynamics. This study provides valuable insights into the changing patterns of family communication within the Chinese community and underscores the importance of addressing these shifts to maintain healthy family relationships.

Keywords: Social Media, Family Communication, Media Use, Chinese Adolescents

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, the Internet and social media platforms have become integral parts of daily life for many individuals, particularly younger generations (Saputro et al., 2023). Users can use social media to interact with friends, colleagues, and strangers by sharing significant incidents through status updates, images, and other sources. Meanwhile, it can be used to stay in touch with friends and family members who live in a globalized society where people are constantly migrating. Social media are also used for job hunting and professional networking, as well as for conducting business, romance, and flirtation (Aichner et al., 2021). Meanwhile, customers can use social networks to stay in touch with their favourite brands and stores, allowing them to escape crowds and purchase products from other retailers (Global Stats, 2021).

Internet and social media usage is increasing worldwide, and this has not spared Malaysia either, which has one of the highest Internet penetrations in Southeast Asia (Ha & Chuah, 2023). According to Internet World statistics, there are 30, 987, 000 Internet users in Malaysia in 2022. This figure corresponds to a 93.8% penetration, and most of these users used the Internet to participate in social media (DSM, 2022). Statistics published by Statista (2022) show that the number of social media users has increased from 62% in 2016 to 91.7%, representing 30.25 million of the Malaysian population in 2022. Social media is central to many Malaysian lives (Ling, 2022). They spend one-third of their days on social media. Research shows that Malaysians spend, on average, 9 hours and 10 minutes daily on social networks in the Malaysian Digital Marketing 2022 report (2022). In 2023, 99.8% of social media users were older than 18, and more than half (51.4%) were male (Digital 2023 Malaysia, 2023).

The influx of social media has broadened the technological and knowledge gap between family members, particularly between parents and children (Tadpatrikar et al., 2021). According to Mustafa et al. (2020), the intensity of Internet addiction can damage the entire family, affecting family systems, functions, roles, and relationships. Owing to their exposure to social networks, parents may not be aware of the language and terminology that their children use. Another factor that may affect adult children's interactions with their parents is how well their parents communicate with them. When young children struggle with conflicting needs or become alienated from their parents, they may change their opinions about their parents' communication styles and affect how the rest of the family interacts (LaFreniere, 2020). Furthermore, studies have shown that spending time with friends

¹Faculty of Social Sciences, Quest International University, Ipoh Perak, Malaysia: thaya.tilaga@gmail.com

during stressful times can provide adolescents with an accessible, favorable, and fulfilling environment that can help ease mental upheaval (Knudsen, 2017).

Today, family communication occurs frequently on social media platforms. It enables young adults to acquire information, advice, and guidance over the Internet on any topic of interest (Wood et al., 2023). Young adults sought advice and guidance from their parents and grandparents regarding the problems they faced. Therefore, family communication appears to help maintain good relationships among family members. However, since the advent of social networks, the communication patterns of young adults in families have changed. Thus, increasing social isolation and Internet addiction among young adults results in minimal family interactions between children and their parents (Mmbwanga et al., 2019).

Since the rise of social networks, Internet addiction in adolescents has always been a concern for parents. Teenagers who use social media tend to lose control, engage in addictive behaviors, and become more violent (Lee et al., 2023). As the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia, Chinese adolescents account for 34% of the Internet addiction rate in Malaysia, and the Internet addiction rate is the highest among all ethnic groups (Fu et al., 2022). Family relationships are directly affected by Internet addiction. Poor communication caused by overreliance on social media networks is pervasive, making it difficult to fulfill family obligations and be there for loved ones in times of need (Sheldon & Ware, 2023). This significantly negatively affects the quality of shared relationships (SnigdhaSamantray, 2017). As a result of excessive social media use, young adults isolate themselves from the world, leading to family conflict and a decline in social relationships (Hemberg et al., 2022). Therefore, this study sought to examine how the use of social networks affects family communication among Chinese adolescents aged between 18 and 24 years. In addition, as the second-largest ethnic group in Malaysia, Chinese adolescents are an important market segment to study for two reasons. First, Chinese adolescents showed the highest Internet addiction rate compared to other ethnic groups. Second, there is an increase in the divorce rate in the Chinese community owing to family attachment (Noor et al., 2022).

1.1. Objective Of The Study

To date, little is known about the effects of social media on family communication among Chinese adolescents. Therefore, it would be interesting to present a study on social media use and how it affects family communication among Chinese adolescents. Based on this general objective, this study addressed two specific objectives: 1). To investigate the level of social media usage; and 2). To examine how social network use affects family communication among Chinese adolescents.

2. Literature Review

According to Evli and Şimşek (2022), adolescence is transitioning from childhood to adulthood. During this period, bio-psychosocial changes will be experienced by adolescents (MacKenzie et al., 2022). Putri et al. (2022) stated that they would experience sudden changes in mood, insecurity, conflict, anxiety, and excitement. Apparent to these situations, adolescents can be harmed by social stress, which can cause difficulties in managing conflicts and affect their mental and social development. To avoid and overcome these situations, they find a platform to relax and relieve their social stress. This will lead to Internet and social media addiction.

Internet and social media addiction is generally defined as a failure to stop the desire for excessive use of technology gadgets to view the Internet or social media, a loss of importance of the time spent away from the Internet, and feelings of extreme excitement when actively using the Internet (Hassan et al., 2020). Many studies have found that the Internet and social media play an essential role in adolescents' acquisition of lifelong learning skills, addressing their learning demands, and facilitating access to information. Social media chats provide adolescents with exciting social surroundings (Zhao, 2021). This potential afforded by social media allows adolescents to feel that they belong to a group. Social media chatting boosts the amount and quality of time spent with friends and has a favorable impact on adolescents' psychological well-being (Hawi & Samaha 2019).

Nevertheless, there are always two sides to the coin: heavy usage of social media could also have an adverse effect on adolescents' learning behaviour. Previous studies have found that an excessive amount of time spent browsing social media can cause poor time management (Azizi et al., 2019; Sobaih et al., 2020; Gulua & Kharadze, 2022), increase stress and anxiety (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020; Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2023), and increase cyberbullying (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2022; Margolis & Amanbekova, 2023). D'Arienzo et al. (2019) stated Internet addiction as excessive use of the Internet and social media, failure to control social media use, and its potential to cause serious harm to the life of the individual. Martins et al. (2020). identified that excessive use of the Internet and social media could cause an individual to have difficulties at home, work, school, and in social or psychological life. These findings suggest that Internet and social media addiction have negative consequences for an individual's family, social life, and environment.

However, most studies have shown that this may cause social problems (Bloemen & De Coninck, 2020). The technological revolution has changed the pattern of communication and connections with people, including family members. Across the Internet, numerous social media platforms are available for free access. Social media has some addictive features, such as endless scrolling, social pressure, behavioural suggestions, reward systems, and continuous streaming, which make users continue connecting to the channel or platform (Montag et al., 2019). The popularity and multifunctionality of social media have led to increased screen time and a decrease in real-life

interactions among adolescents, specifically with family members (Yang et al., 2022). Thus, social media has the potential to impact adolescents' lifestyles negatively. Furthermore, excessive use of social media on a regular basis is harmful because it allows adolescents to avoid face-to-face interactions with family and friends.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative methodology by conducting in-depth interviews. Furthermore, in-depth interviews can provide more profound knowledge and hands-on experience regarding the studied issues (Sun et al., 2020). The population targeted was adolescents aged 18–24 who lived with their families and used social media. Seven adolescents were asked to participate in the interviews. Drani et al. (2021) stated that five to twenty-five informants were sufficient to clearly understand the subject under consideration.

Adolescents who stayed with their family members were eligible to participate in this study. The researcher obtained information from past participants who were interviewed to find future informants. The former participants were mostly aware of the conditions of the subsequent participants. None of the participants withdrew from the interviews. The participants indicated their desire to participate in the study by providing informed consent. Furthermore, the identities of the participants were coded, and only the researchers were aware of them.

Data collection for this research was conducted through in-depth interviews using semi-structured and open-ended questions. The interview questions were adapted from Mesch (2006). A pre-test was conducted on the interview questions with three Chinese adolescents who met the sampling requirements. In-depth interviews were performed using the Chinese language and slang terms, or "local dialects," to facilitate the informants' better understanding of the questions posed by the researcher. In-depth conversations with participants took place over 40–45 minutes. The participants' preferred locations were used for the interviews. The data were then recorded and transcribed to identify patterns and themes. The researchers also made notes so that they could refer to them if the recordings were malfunctioning.

4. Results / Analysis

4.1. Background Of Respondents

Seven Chinese adolescents were interviewed for this study. Six respondents were aged 18-21, and one respondent was aged 23. Four of the seven respondents were male. All respondents stayed with family members and used social media to communicate and connect with people in their circles.

4.2. Types Of Social Media Used By Respondents

All respondents used Instagram as the primary medium to connect with people. The respondents used Instagram to follow others to see what they did in their daily lives. Following the Instagram application, four respondents used Facebook to stay tuned to friends, browse videos, and obtain daily news. Two respondents used Dou Yin to obtain news and entertainment abroad. WhatsApp, WeChat, and Xiao Hong Shu were used as communication applications to chat with friends and family, discuss tasks, and perform tasks. Furthermore, respondents revealed that they used YouTube and Reddit simultaneously.

4.3. The Intensity Of Social Media Use

Unfortunately, respondents tended to spend more time connecting with social networks and online friends and less time communicating with their families. Respondents 1, 2, 4, and 7 claimed that they spent more than eight hours a day browsing social media. However, respondents 3 and 5 spent less than five hours on social media.

Respondent 1

'I used to spend more than 8 hours on social media. I always watch videos and chat with my friends.'

Respondent 2

'I like to use YouTube and Instagram to connect with people. I used to spend 8 to 9 hours on social networks.'

Respondent 3

'I will browse social media in my free time. I used to spend 5 hours a day on social networks.'

Respondent 4

'Social media is my soulmate; I used to spend around 5 hours chatting and watching videos.'

It can be assumed that respondents tend to spend more time online with friends than engaging in physical activity with family members. This shows that respondents spent a significant and positive amount of time connected to social networks, achieving the first objective of the investigation into the level of social media use.

4.4. Quality Time Spent With Family

Every respondent stated that they spent two to three hours per day communicating with family members. They communicate only with family members when they have specific needs or goals. Furthermore, although they live

under the same roof, they communicate with family members via social media. According to the findings, most respondents spent more time with their families on weekends than on weekdays, owing to the required classes and work. The majority of respondents stated that they ate more meals with their families. Respondents also mentioned that they spent time with their families doing things such as sharing time, watching movies, shopping, and having light-hearted conversations.

Respondent 2

'I will spend time with my family on weekends because I am swamped on weekdays. On weekdays, I devote time-consuming dinners to my family members. I used to spend around 2 to 3 hours with them a day.'

Respondent 7

'I am a student and work part-time, I used to spend time with my family around 1 to 2 hours a day.'

4.5. Perceptions About Social Media Use In Family Communication

Three respondents believed that social media does not affect family communication; however, the personality of each family member and how they communicate with each other were factors affecting family communication rather than social media usage. The respondents also mentioned that social media helps strengthen the bonds between family members, provides benefits in communicating with family members, and increases social interaction with family members. Four out of seven respondents believed that social media use affects family communication since the emergence of social networks takes up more time for an individual, leading to the neglect of family communication. In addition, some respondents used social media to avoid arguments and disputes, leading to a gradual shift away from physical communication. The results confirmed adolescents' perceptions of social media use toward family communication; hence, the second objective of perception was achieved.

Respondent 1

'I am relatively introverted, so if I encounter something, I usually don't talk about it unless it gets to the point where I have to discuss it with my family members. So, I believe it is not a matter of using social media but of my character. In addition, I feel more comfortable using social media alone than interacting with my family or others. Although I do not communicate much with my family, I do not think that social networks impact family communication because I believe it is a problem with my personality. However, I still urge all families to prioritize family communication because we can better understand each other through physical communication than virtual text. After all, physical communication allows us to feel the real expressions of each other.'

Respondent 2

'Social media does not seem to have an impact on my family's communication because my mother regularly uses Facebook on her own after work. She will let me know about any significant news or information that she comes across, and we will then discuss it. Therefore, I believe that social networks foster more interactions and conversations. It is not that we ignore communication to check our social networks. Therefore, I think social networks have more to do with how their users perceive and use them than how they affect family communication. Therefore, the emergence of social networks is not a hindrance, as family communication will still suffer even in the absence of social networks if we are unwilling to communicate with our families.'

Respondent 4

'I think social media is affecting family communication. Although I have mentioned before that I communicate with my family during mealtimes, we tend to surf social media when we eat together. By contrast, we eat rather than engage in family interactions. Yes, our personalities also somehow affect family communication, but I think social networks affect us more. I believe that the more time we spend on social networks, the less time we have for family communication and interaction, which can lead to family conflict or lack of family cohesion.'

Respondent 5

'I think social networks are affecting family communication because sometimes when we have too much time on social networks, we will become very lazy to interact with the physical world, which could lead to us neglecting our family members. Too much use of social networks also leads to a decline in our ability to express ourselves and how we interact with our family, especially face-to-face. I think this research is good to conduct, as we can introduce it regarding the time spent on social media usage and whether it would affect relationships with family members. Users may also know that long-term use affects family communication, but they will not face it. This research may help us to face this problem.'

5. Discussion

The first objective was to assess the extent of social media use among Chinese adolescents. The results revealed that the respondents commonly accessed the social media platform Instagram, which was visited and accessed by

all the respondents, followed by Facebook, Dou Yin, WhatsApp, WeChat, Xiao Hong Shu, YouTube, and Reddit. Chinese adolescents prefer to seek information and entail on Instagram (CH-Wang et al., 2023). The respondents believed that the information obtained from Instagram was accurate and valuable. Instagram has been proven to have a large number of users due to the visual appeal, social interaction, influencer culture, personalised content, and business opportunities on Instagram that many people follow (Thomas et al., 2020).

The second objective was to examine whether the use of social networks affects family communication among Chinese adolescents. The time spent by respondents on social media ranged from three hours to more than eight hours on average. This indicates that young adolescents tend to spend more hours browsing social media than spending time with family members. Additionally, they become addicted and enjoy the information they obtain from social media (Sultan, 2021). These findings are supported by Auxier et al. (2021), who proposed that teenagers who engage in excessive social media use eventually become preoccupied and lose control of their compulsive behaviors. Furthermore, by observing and comparing the amount of time respondents spent with their families and on social networks, it can be seen that they spent more time socializing on social networks than with their families. The family cohesion that informed this study is also affirmed to be true, since it reports that increased use of social media will decrease the time parents and children spend together and weaken bonds within families (Orben, 2020).

The study findings indicated that respondents were more inclined to engage in or disclose to friends online than families. With friends, respondents were more likely to have frank and relaxed conversations. They are more likely to accept, comprehend, and support each other because of their similar ages. These findings confirm Knudsen's (2017) statement that adolescents can find an open, encouraging, and rewarding environment when they are with their peers during challenging times, which can help calm the emotional turmoil that adolescence can bring. Furthermore, parental resistance and denial also lead adolescents to have different perceptions of general parental communication, which affects their interactions with their parents (Eskin, 2022).

Respondents identified that the advancement of social media had an enormous impact on family communication, especially when it came to the effect of social media on family communication. During the time spent eating with their families, some respondents said they still preferred browsing social media to engaging in genuine conversations or connections. Mmbwanga (2019) stated that the primary concern of using social networking sites is that people spend more time communicating online and managing their use in cyberspace; they may spend less time interacting with each other in the real world. However, many respondents also mentioned that personality was one of the main issues at family borders. According to the findings, most respondents felt embarrassed to reveal difficulties or inner feelings to their families for various reasons, including the incomprehensibility of their parents, which prevented them from worrying or burdening them and their personalities.

This study found that adolescents' personalities were more influential in family communication trends, even though social media use can take up more personal time. Instead, adolescents' sincere reluctance to accept communication is the key to family communication (Davies et al., 2022). However, some respondents agreed that new communication technologies could help generate more conversations and improve family interactions. In this study, Chinese adolescents rarely engaged in physical communication or interaction with their families or parents; instead, they preferred to browse social networks independently. They did not believe that social media affected family communication. This finding calls for more sophisticated research on how adolescents' personalities affect family communication.

6. Recommendation For Future Studies

One of the limitations of this study was the method of conducting in-depth individual interviews. Regarding how social media use affects family communication among Chinese adolescents, the researchers collected data from only seven respondents, which may lead to findings that do not adequately represent various perspectives. Future studies could employ quantitative methods with a larger number of respondents to ensure that the validation of the data is reliable. Another limitation is the lack of data from the parent's perspective. Future research could further examine parents' and children's attitudes toward actual children on social media platforms. A third limitation of this study is that personality factors were not explored in the Results section. Future quantitative studies should examine whether personality factors are crucial for family communication. Furthermore, quantitative follow-up studies will help understand this phenomenon on a large scale and assess the impact of different variables on personality in this study on family communication. In this study, the participants were adolescents aged 21-24. In future studies, Internet and social media addiction can be examined using different developmental stages, such as children, middle-aged or older participants, and other ethnicities, to compare Internet and social media addiction.

7. Conclusion

Ideally, the entire family should have time to talk to each other in person. Teenagers should learn how to communicate their feelings to their parents and other family members to avoid misunderstandings. Family communication emphasizes face-to-face interaction and building relationships more than text and voice communication over the Internet. According to Lopez & Cuarteros (2019), communication is the fuel that keeps the fire of your relationship burning; without it, your relationship will freeze to death." Therefore, a balanced time distribution is vital for maintaining good family communication.

Based on the study's objectives, it can be concluded that, as suggested by several respondents, social networks have substantially impacted family communication. Teens spend most of their daily time on social networks and spend less time connecting with their families. However, many participants also said that the development of social networks is not a barrier since teens are hesitant to contact their families, and family communication is going to decline even in the absence of social networks. It would be helpful to further investigate this phenomenon because it demonstrates how adolescents' characteristics clash with family communication.

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