

Social Cohesion and Social Media Threats to Families in the Digital Era

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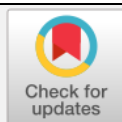
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ARTICLE INFO

Publication Info:
Research Article



How to cite:

Maihasni, M., Fachrina, F., Anggraini, N., & Ariesta, A. (2025). Social Cohesion and Social Media Threats to Families in the Digital Era. *Society*, 13(2), 796–813.

DOI: [10.33019/society.v13i2.833](https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v13i2.833)

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Received: March 22, 2025;

Accepted: April 21, 2025;

Published: April 28, 2025;

ABSTRACT

This study examines social cohesion within the family and the potential threats posed by social media use in the digital era. It focuses on identifying specific forms of disruption to family cohesion and the adaptive strategies families employ in response. The research was conducted in Padang City using a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation, with families as the unit of analysis. The data analysis followed a three-stage interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that social media negatively affects familial relationships, as reflected in altered communication patterns, reduced empathy and concern, stronger privacy boundaries, and the emergence of mutual suspicion. In response, families adopt strategies such as mindful management of social media use, heightened awareness of digital risks, and the reinforcement of interpersonal communication to preserve social cohesion within the household.

Keywords: Digital Threats; Family; Interpersonal Interaction; Social Cohesion; Social Media

1. Introduction

Social cohesion within the family plays a vital role in fostering and maintaining harmony among its members. A growing body of research highlights that cohesion acts as a binding force, reinforcing emotional ties and solidarity within the family unit (Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2019; Supriandi & Pujowati, 2024). High levels of family cohesion are associated with reduced internal conflict and the creation of a supportive environment that is particularly beneficial for the growth and well-being of children and adolescents.

However, the rapid advancement of digital technology has presented new challenges to sustaining family cohesion. One of the most pressing issues is the emergence of an intergenerational digital divide, which may lead to social fragmentation within households. Studies have shown that disparities in access to and proficiency with digital technologies between parents and children can result in emotional disconnection and weakened interpersonal interactions (Lawang et al., 2021).

According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), internet usage in Indonesia rose from 78.19% to 79.5% in 2024. This upward trend has persisted over the last five years, with a substantial share of users originating from the millennial generation. While technological development presents opportunities for families to maintain social connections through digital platforms, it also redefines the nature of communication, overcoming previous spatial and temporal constraints (Shi et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the pervasive use of social media has also been linked to adverse effects on family dynamics. Excessive screen time can significantly diminish face-to-face interactions and foster emotional distance among family members (Williams & Merten, 2011). As a result, families are increasingly required to adopt adaptive strategies that not only incorporate digital tools into everyday life in a productive manner but also prioritize interpersonal communication to preserve familial bonds in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

This study is guided by two primary research questions: (1) In what ways can social media pose a threat to social cohesion within the family? and (2) What strategies are implemented by families to mitigate these threats? The research specifically examines families with adolescent children in Padang City, Indonesia.

The study aims to offer practical insights for families, particularly in enhancing children's digital literacy by integrating digital practices into daily routines. Such integration is expected to strengthen children's capacity to meet academic and social challenges in the digital age (Qaiser, 2020). In addition, the findings are intended to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions on the responsible and constructive use of social media to reinforce collective efficacy and resilience within the family (Barge Gul Khalili et al., 2024; Procentese et al., 2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Cohesion in International Scholarship

Social cohesion within the family refers to the degree of emotional closeness, solidarity, and mutual cooperation among its members (Olson et al., 2000). According to Myers, social cohesion reflects the depth of relationships and the sense of belonging experienced by family members (Myers, 2012). This cohesion is manifested through open communication, expressions of affection, and mutual trust. It provides a foundational basis for maintaining internal family stability, facilitating effective communication, and nurturing consistent emotional support.

From a broader sociological perspective, Durkheim views social cohesion as a key element in maintaining societal order, including within microstructures such as families (Durkheim, 2019). In this context, family cohesion contributes significantly to the development of adolescent

values and moral orientation. These values are shaped through regular interactions and emotionally supportive relationships with parents (Smetana, 2011), while also reinforcing a collective moral identity (Skitka & Tetlock, 1993). Cohesion within the family is fostered through emotional intimacy and the capacity of members to engage empathetically with one another (Gottman, 2019). Over the long term, strong family cohesion has been shown to enhance individual resilience in facing both social and economic stressors.

To operationalize the concept of family cohesion, scholars have identified several key dimensions, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Dimensions of Social Cohesion in the Family

No	Dimension	Source
1	Emotional Bond	(Olson et al., 2000)
2	Open Communication	(Segrin & Flora, 2018)
3	Social Support	(Gottman, 2019; Marmot, 2005)
4	Commitment to Family	(Sabatelli, 2003)
5	Time and Shared Activities	(Reimann et al., 2022)
6	Shared Values	(Schwartz, 2003)
7	Family Resilience	(Walsh, 2016a)

These seven dimensions collectively offer a comprehensive framework for assessing relational strength within the family. Each dimension is interconnected and contributes to the reinforcement of others. For instance, open communication can deepen emotional bonds, while shared values can enhance familial commitment and resilience. Within the field of family sociology, these dimensions serve as critical indicators for evaluating the health and functioning of contemporary family systems.

2.2. Social Media and Its Influence on Families

Social media has become an integral part of contemporary society. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have transformed the ways in which individuals communicate and maintain social relationships. Despite offering numerous benefits, social media also presents challenges to family life, particularly concerning the quality of shared time, attentiveness, and patterns of interpersonal communication (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011).

A number of studies have indicated that unregulated use of social media may disrupt direct interactions within the family, foster emotionally distant relationships, and heighten the risk of conflict and dysfunction within household dynamics (Coyne et al., 2014). These findings suggest that social media exerts both positive and negative influences. The dual nature of its impact on family relationships is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media on Families

No	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Source
1	Maintaining long-distance relationships	Reducing face-to-face interaction	(Amaruddin et al., 2020; Turkle, 2011)
2	Access to parenting information	Superficial communication	(Maeve Duggan, 2015; Uhls et al., 2014)
3	Constructing family identity	Social media addiction	(Clark, 2013; Corcaci, 2023)

No	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Source
4	Shared entertainment	Heightened conflict	(Coyne et al., 2014, 2017)
5	Enhancing digital literacy	Decline in parental supervision	(S. Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Mascheroni et al., 2018)
6	Opportunities for self-publishing and expression	–	(Mascheroni et al., 2018)

Table 2 illustrates that digital media functions as a double-edged sword in the context of family life. When employed purposefully and critically, it can serve as a means for strengthening family ties, promoting educational content, and providing entertainment. However, without conscious regulation and awareness, the same media may weaken emotional bonds, reduce the quality of interpersonal interaction, and compromise the effectiveness of parenting and communication practices.

2.3. Social Media as a Threat to Social Cohesion in the Family

Social media presents various potential threats to social cohesion within the family. One of the primary concerns is the declining frequency of direct interpersonal interaction among family members, as individual engagement with digital platforms often takes precedence over face-to-face communication. Additionally, social media exposes individuals, particularly adolescents, to values, norms, and lifestyles that may contradict those upheld within the family, potentially leading to conflict or ideological rifts (Turkle, 2011).

Another major issue concerns the unregulated use of social media by children and adolescents, which can hinder open communication with parents and contribute to a breakdown in mutual trust (S. Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Furthermore, the construction of digital identities that diverge significantly from familial expectations or cultural norms can undermine a shared sense of identity and belonging, weakening the bonds that sustain family cohesion.

These threats are summarized in **Table 3** below, which outlines specific patterns and their associated impacts on familial dynamics.

Table 3. Forms of Social Media Threats to Social Cohesion

No	Form of Threat	Impact on Social Cohesion	Source
1	Fragmentation of family values	Erosion of shared moral and cultural understanding	(Faulkner, 2018)
2	Disruption of communication patterns	Decline in effective interpersonal interaction	(McDaniel & Coyne, 2016)
3	Partner jealousy	Breakdown of trust in marital relationships	(Muise et al., 2009)
4	Role and responsibility imbalances	Neglect of familial duties and obligations	(Walsh, 2016b)
5	Recurring conflicts over online behavior	Increase in domestic tension and resistance	(Coyne et al., 2014)
6	Social isolation and dependence	Weakening of emotional connectedness and solidarity	(Kuss & Griffiths, 2017)

Table 3 highlights a range of contemporary challenges stemming from the integration of digital technologies into everyday life. These challenges reveal how shifting values and media habits may erode the functional role of the family as a unit of socialization and emotional support. In more severe cases, the disintegration of interpersonal relationships within the household can extend outward, affecting community cohesion more broadly.

Addressing these challenges requires deliberate adaptive strategies that prioritize effective communication, sustained value education, and the regulation of media use within the home environment. These efforts are essential for preserving the integrity of family relationships in an increasingly digital society.

2.4. Family Strategies in Facing Social Media Threats

To preserve social cohesion within families in the digital era, a range of strategic approaches may be employed. One essential step is to establish time boundaries for social media use, particularly during shared moments such as meals or weekends. Additionally, parents are expected to serve as role models by demonstrating healthy and responsible engagement with digital platforms (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Another key strategy involves cultivating digital literacy among all family members to ensure that they are aware of both the benefits and potential risks associated with social media use, including misinformation, cyberbullying, and digital addiction (Boyd, 2014).

In addition to these measures, families are encouraged to engage in joint activities that promote face-to-face interaction, such as device-free gatherings, recreational outings, and regular discussions. These practices are instrumental in reinforcing emotional closeness and interpersonal solidarity among family members.

The strategies adopted by families to address the potential threats posed by social media are outlined in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Family Strategies in Responding to Social Media Threats

No	Strategy	Main Purpose	Reference
1	Digital literacy	Enhancing understanding of media risks and opportunities	(S. Livingstone & Helsper, 2007)
2	Social media usage rules	Establishing a balanced digital environment	(Anisa, 2024)
3	Face-to-face communication patterns	Fostering emotional intimacy and openness	(Olson et al., 2000)
4	Modeling healthy digital behavior	Providing practical examples of responsible media use	(Elias & Sulkin, 2019)
5	Device-free shared activities	Strengthening cohesion through direct and meaningful experiences	(Kurniati et al., 2020)
6	Supportive family engagement	Mitigating negative impacts without authoritarian control	(Ashaari et al., 2021)
7	Reinforcement of family values	Building internal solidarity and a shared identity	(Putnam, 2000)

As illustrated in **Table 4**, these seven strategies serve as both preventive and constructive responses to the challenges digital technology presents to family cohesion. They encompass educational (digital literacy, behavioral modeling), regulatory (rules for media use), relational

(in-person communication and joint experiences), cultural (value reinforcement), and emotional-supportive (family engagement) dimensions. When integrated holistically into family life, these approaches not only help safeguard cohesion but can also enhance the resilience and adaptability of families navigating the complexities of the digital age.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of families in relation to social media use (Moleong, 2019). The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine phenomena within their natural context, with the researcher functioning as the primary instrument for data collection (Sugiyono, 2020). A descriptive design was selected as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how social media influences social cohesion within families and the forms of disruption that may arise from its use.

3.2. Research Subjects and Sampling Technique

The research focused on families actively engaged in social media use. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify informants who possessed characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Informants included parents and their adolescent children, both of whom were selected due to their substantial exposure to and involvement with digital media in everyday family life. The inclusion of both generational perspectives aimed to provide a more holistic understanding of intergenerational dynamics in the digital context.

3.3. Research Instruments

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These methods were chosen to obtain rich, contextualized insights into how social media use impacts family relationships and what strategies are adopted to mitigate related challenges. The flexibility of these techniques allowed the researcher to adapt questions based on situational dynamics and the communicative comfort of each informant. Participation was open to individuals who were capable of verbal communication and willing to reflect on their digital experiences within the family setting.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection commenced with efforts to build rapport and trust among participating families. Interviews were conducted separately with parents and children at different times to minimize bias and reduce the influence of one party on another's responses. This approach was intended to ensure greater objectivity and data integrity. Consequently, the time required for fieldwork was extended compared to studies involving only a single respondent group.

3.5. Data Reliability and Validation

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, multiple validation techniques were employed. Triangulation was used to cross-verify findings from interviews and observational data. For example, responses from parents were compared with those of their children and validated through contextual observations and supporting perspectives from other family members. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by documenting potential biases and ensuring analytical transparency. Field notes were systematically compiled and organized to support the authenticity of the findings.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initially, the data were categorized according to the perspectives of parents and children. This was followed by a thematic interpretation guided by a relevant theoretical framework. The use of this analytical model proved effective in identifying the various forms of social media-related threats to family cohesion, as well as the adaptive strategies implemented, particularly by parents, to manage such challenges. The findings ultimately suggest that when used thoughtfully and with clear boundaries, social media can contribute to strengthening rather than weakening social cohesion within the family.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Threat of Social Media to Family Relationships

Social media poses a significant threat to family relationships when its use is not carefully regulated. In the context of family life, direct interpersonal interaction, fundamental to communication and emotional bonding, is often replaced by prolonged screen time. As Livingstone and Blum-Ross argue, digital media can disrupt familial routines and reduce the frequency of meaningful conversations, particularly when screens dominate moments traditionally reserved for togetherness (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). When family members prioritize their devices over face-to-face engagement during shared occasions, such as mealtimes or evening gatherings, emotional closeness may erode. This situation can lead to feelings of alienation, misrecognition, and emotional neglect among family members.

Moreover, social media introduces external stimuli and interactions that may not always be conducive to family harmony. The spread of misinformation, exposure to problematic content, or unsolicited contact from unknown individuals can foster distrust and even generate conflict (Boyd, 2014). Without deliberate and reflective management, these digital interferences can destabilize the affective and communicative foundation upon which healthy family relationships rest.

Research by Turkle reinforces this concern, suggesting that the mere presence of mobile devices in shared spaces can reduce the depth of interpersonal engagement and empathy (Turkle, 2011). Therefore, the uncritical adoption of digital habits within the household can compromise the family's role as a site of emotional support, care, and socialization.

4.1.1. Changing Patterns of Family Interaction

The advancement of information and communication technology, particularly through social media, has profoundly transformed how family members interact. In the pre-digital era, familial interaction predominantly occurred through face-to-face conversation, around the dinner table, while relaxing in the living room, or during shared chores and leisure. These exchanges relied not only on spoken words but also on affective cues such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, all of which contributed to emotional bonding (Clark, 2013).

Today, such meaningful interpersonal engagements are increasingly displaced by rapid, screen-mediated communication. Text messages, short video clips, and curated social media updates have become dominant modes of exchange. While efficient, these forms of interaction often lack emotional depth and spontaneity. The appeal of social media, its interactivity, novelty, and algorithmic personalization, makes it a formidable competitor to traditional familial communication (Boyd, 2014).

In many households, shared activities such as family dinners or casual evening conversations are disrupted by digital multitasking. Individuals may sit together physically but remain mentally and emotionally disconnected, each engrossed in their respective screens. This phenomenon, described by Turkle as “being alone together,” illustrates how technology can simultaneously connect individuals to distant networks while detaching them from immediate relationships (Turkle, 2011).

A common example of this shift is the decline in collective television viewing, which once served as a platform for shared entertainment and informal conversation. Today, personalized mobile content has replaced this shared experience, weakening opportunities for synchronous emotional involvement.

Parents are especially sensitive to these changes. Many report that their children spend more time engaging with online peers than with the family. Attempts to initiate conversation are often met with brief or distracted responses, prompting concerns about diminishing respect, social empathy, and the loss of direct communication skills, skills that remain vital for real-world functioning and emotional intelligence (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Importantly, this digital disconnection is not confined to children or adolescents. Adults, too, may retreat into personal digital spaces after work, seeking comfort in scrolling or streaming. Although understandable as a form of stress relief, this practice limits emotional availability and weakens familial cohesion.

It is worth noting, however, that not all digitally mediated interaction is detrimental. For geographically separated families, social media can sustain bonds and facilitate frequent communication. Research by Clark highlights how parents and children use messaging platforms to maintain a sense of presence across distance (Clark, 2013). Yet, when such tools are overused within the same household, they risk inducing social isolation in co-located members.

Encouragingly, the transformations induced by social media may also motivate adaptive responses. A child who previously prioritized digital interactions may gradually develop an awareness of emotional responsibility within the family, particularly when supported by open dialogue, role modeling, and empathetic guidance. Such behavioral adjustments reflect what boyd describes as “networked self-awareness”, an emergent understanding of one’s role within both digital and real-world relationships (Boyd, 2014).

4.1.2. Loss of a Sense of Caring Within the Family

In today’s digitally saturated environment, social media has become deeply embedded in the daily lives of families. Its capacity to streamline communication and broaden access to information is widely recognized. However, alongside these benefits lie adverse implications for family dynamics, chief among them is the erosion of genuine care and emotional attentiveness among family members. When attention is disproportionately directed at digital screens rather than toward those physically present, emotional connectivity and interpersonal engagement are gradually displaced (Turkle, 2011).

This shift is increasingly apparent in everyday family routines. Children and adolescents, often characterized as digital natives, tend to prioritize screen-based leisure activities such as video streaming, mobile gaming, or social networking over direct interaction with family members or participation in household responsibilities (Boyd, 2014). Even shared rituals like family dinners, which traditionally serve as opportunities for storytelling and connection, have become muted affairs, overshadowed by the ubiquitous presence of personal devices. As direct communication becomes infrequent, core values of familial intimacy begin to erode (Clark, 2013).

The absence of such engagement fosters emotional detachment and interpersonal disconnection. When a family member requires help or wishes to share a concern but receives delayed or distracted responses due to another's immersion in digital media, it diminishes the sense of being valued. Over time, these patterns lead to frustration, feelings of neglect, and relational tension that threaten the cohesion of the household.

Furthermore, diminished responsiveness compromises the development of empathy. Children who grow up in environments with limited face-to-face interaction may struggle to decode emotional expressions or demonstrate concern for others, a dynamic that undermines their social-emotional learning (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). The scarcity of emotional exchanges reduces opportunities for nurturing compassion, concern, and emotional literacy, foundations that are essential to sustaining healthy familial relationships (Gottman, 2019).

The individualistic orientation promoted by social media also alters family dynamics. Each member curates a separate digital world, often defined by algorithm-driven interests, parasocial relationships, and engagement with distant social networks. While such activity may foster a sense of global connection, it often comes at the cost of weakening ties within the home. The irony lies in social media's dual function: it connects individuals across distances while distancing those in close physical proximity (Turkle, 2011).

This condition worsens when social media becomes a mechanism for emotional avoidance. Rather than confronting intra-family issues through dialogue, individuals may seek distraction in digital content. Such avoidance strategies not only suppress conflict resolution but also delay emotional healing. Persistent reliance on social media to escape discomfort further entrenches emotional distance and impedes reconciliation (Coyne et al., 2014).

Restoring a sense of care within the family requires deliberate and consistent efforts. Parents play a pivotal role as behavioral models. By instituting device-free periods, during mealtimes, family outings, or designated "connection hours", they can signal the importance of presence and attentiveness. Involving children in routine domestic activities and fostering regular, tech-free family bonding opportunities can help rebuild intimacy and restore emotional reciprocity.

Ultimately, care and empathy cannot be meaningfully cultivated through emoji reactions or digital shorthand. They must be developed through sustained presence, responsive listening, and relational investment. Families that manage to balance the utility of digital media with a commitment to nurturing emotional ties are better positioned to maintain cohesion in the face of technological disruption (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Turkle, 2011).

4.1.3. Added Privacy and Personal Boundaries

The proliferation of social media as a central aspect of daily life has reshaped interpersonal dynamics within families. One of the most palpable transformations is the emergence of heightened personal boundaries and a redefinition of privacy, particularly among children and adolescents. Whereas privacy once referred primarily to physical space, it now extends into the digital realm, where it is often difficult for parents to observe or monitor their children's online interactions. Today, adolescents not only retreat to their bedrooms for solitude but also curate digital spaces, such as social media profiles, private chat groups, and online communities, that are largely inaccessible to other family members.

This shift introduces a subtle yet significant emotional distance. Many adolescents now find it more comfortable to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and identities with peers or within online communities than within their own families. For example, the use of features such as "Close Friends," "Hidden Stories," or toggling visibility settings on platforms like Instagram

allows youth to selectively filter content from parental view. Similarly, the manipulation of “last seen” or “read receipts” features on messaging apps enables them to avoid familial communication expectations. While these practices may reflect a growing desire for autonomy, they also pose a risk to family openness and transparency (Boydt, 2014).

Digital privacy, in principle, is an important component of adolescent development. It facilitates identity formation, encourages self-reflection, and nurtures independence. However, when such privacy turns into an impenetrable boundary that limits familial access to the child's social or emotional world, it jeopardizes relational intimacy. Parents may become disconnected from key aspects of their children's development, potentially missing signs of emotional distress, online harassment, or behavioral changes associated with digital overuse.

This disconnection is further exacerbated by the performative nature of social media. Adolescents often curate idealized versions of themselves not only for peers but also for their families. As a result, family communication may become superficial, grounded more in performance than in authenticity. When trust and emotional transparency erode, relationships may become limited to functional exchanges, devoid of genuine intimacy (Turkle, 2011).

To mitigate this dynamic, families, particularly parents, must adopt a balanced and empathetic approach to digital supervision. Excessive control or authoritarian surveillance may provoke resistance, while overly permissive attitudes may expose children to unregulated digital risks. The key lies in fostering open, trust-based communication. Parents should create safe spaces for dialogue, where children feel respected, heard, and involved in establishing digital boundaries (Clark, 2013).

Engaging adolescents in collaborative discussions about the appropriate use of social media and the risks associated with digital exposure can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility. Rather than viewing privacy as a means to avoid familial scrutiny, it can be reframed as a transitional step toward maturity, grounded in mutual respect and emotional connection.

Social media need not be a divisive force. When navigated thoughtfully, it can coexist with healthy family dynamics. Families that build trust-based relationships, maintain open channels of communication, and respect the evolving autonomy of children are more likely to preserve emotional closeness amidst digital change. Personal privacy, then, becomes not a barrier but a bridge, linking adolescent independence with enduring familial bonds (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

4.1.4. The Emergence of Excessive Suspicion Among Family Members

The rapid advancement of communication technology, particularly through social media, has fundamentally altered how families interact. While these platforms offer opportunities for connection, they also introduce new sources of tension. One emerging challenge is the rise of excessive suspicion among family members. What begins as a desire for transparency can easily devolve into conflict, emotional withdrawal, and surveillance behaviors. The openness that once characterized healthy familial communication is gradually replaced by mistrust, often triggered by the ambiguity of digital footprints (Turkle, 2011).

Social media enables access to a wide range of seemingly trivial information, such as online status, recent posts, comment reactions, and the list of followers or accounts liked. In a family setting, these details can become the basis for suspicion among children, parents, and spouses alike. Without constructive communication, curiosity may spiral into invasive behaviors, including reading private messages, demanding passwords, or tracking locations

using digital tools. While often justified as protective or "for their own good," these actions fundamentally reflect a weakening of trust (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

This climate of over-suspicion is particularly apparent in parent-child dynamics, where concerns about online safety, exposure to inappropriate content, or harmful interactions can lead to excessive monitoring. Although well-intentioned, surveillance without open dialogue frequently results in emotional distancing. Adolescents may feel constrained, distrusted, and eventually resort to hiding their online activities. This dynamic often generates a cycle of avoidance and conflict, weakening the parent-child bond (Boyd, 2014).

Similarly, spousal relationships are increasingly affected by digital interactions. Suspicion may arise from seemingly innocuous activities, such as online communication with acquaintances of the opposite sex, delays in message responses, or selective social media engagement. In some cases, these suspicions escalate to accusations of digital infidelity. The inherently ambiguous nature of virtual communication invites varied interpretations, often fueling real-life disputes. As mutual trust erodes, social media transitions from being a medium of connection to an instrument of relational fragmentation (Muise et al., 2009).

The psychological impact of such dynamics is far-reaching. When every digital action is scrutinized, family members may withdraw, avoid meaningful conversations, and experience emotional insecurity within the household. Children, in particular, may suffer long-term consequences, including anxiety and diminished self-confidence, especially during critical stages of identity formation (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

To mitigate these risks, families must actively cultivate an environment of empathy and open communication. Rather than engaging in covert surveillance, family members should express concerns openly, grounded in mutual respect and emotional safety. Constructive dialogue fosters a sense of trust and accountability, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation and overreaction.

Equally important is the development of shared norms around digital ethics. Families should engage in discussions about appropriate online behavior, privacy boundaries, and respectful communication. Parents must model responsible digital conduct, while children should be empowered to navigate online spaces with integrity and accountability. By reinforcing digital literacy and emotional openness, families can transform social media from a source of conflict into a tool for reinforcing emotional closeness.

4.2. Family Strategies for Addressing the Negative Impacts of Social Media

To mitigate the adverse effects of social media on family relationships, a range of proactive strategies can be employed. First, it is essential for all family members to enhance their awareness of the associated risks, including the spread of misinformation, declining interpersonal trust, and the potential for digital dependency. Parents should take the lead in educating their children about responsible social media use while also establishing clear boundaries around screen time, especially during shared family moments such as meals or recreational activities. These efforts can help restore the quality of face-to-face interaction that is fundamental to familial cohesion (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Conversely, youth can also play a critical role by sharing information with their parents about the psychological and social risks of excessive social media engagement. This reciprocal exchange of knowledge fosters intergenerational understanding and helps build a shared awareness of digital challenges within the family (Boyd, 2014).

Second, promoting transparency in digital behavior is vital to prevent misunderstandings and preserve mutual trust. When family members openly discuss their online experiences, such

as content they encounter or conversations they engage in, they reduce the likelihood of secrecy and suspicion, both of which can strain relationships.

Third, implementing digital security and privacy practices, such as using strong passwords, enabling two-factor authentication, and being selective about sharing personal data, helps safeguard family members from cyber threats. These technical precautions are especially important as families become increasingly exposed to data breaches and identity fraud in online environments (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Fourth, organizing regular screen-free activities, such as exercising together, engaging in creative projects, or playing traditional games, can reduce screen dependence and encourage meaningful interactions. These shared experiences contribute to emotional bonding and strengthen the social fabric of the family.

Ultimately, by adopting these strategies in a consistent and empathetic manner, families can build resilience against the social and psychological threats posed by digital media. Rather than viewing social media as an uncontrollable disruptor, families can reclaim agency over its use and ensure that digital tools serve to enrich rather than erode their relational well-being.

4.2.1. Managing Social Media Use in the Family

In the face of various negative consequences posed by social media, the family serves as the primary sphere of protection and guidance. One essential strategy to address this challenge involves the intentional and thoughtful management of social media use within the household. This includes fostering healthy digital habits, such as designating specific times for internet use and establishing “gadget-free” moments. These practices not only limit exposure to potentially harmful content but also preserve the quality of interpersonal relationships within the family (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

A concrete implementation of this strategy is scheduling digital access. For instance, children may be permitted to use social media only after completing school assignments or household responsibilities. Such arrangements help instill a sense of discipline, prioritize real-world obligations, and teach the importance of maintaining a balance between digital engagement and real-life presence.

Designated “technology-free zones,” such as family mealtimes, study hours, or screen-free weekends, further contribute to fostering deeper interpersonal connections. These moments offer valuable opportunities for conversation and shared experiences, unburdened by the distractions of constant notifications and digital noise (Turkle, 2011).

Managing social media use also entails regulating screen exposure before bedtime. Parents often establish nighttime routines, such as turning off devices by 9 p.m., to avoid sleep disruptions caused by prolonged screen time. These routines promote healthier sleep patterns and improve focus during the day, particularly among school-aged children. Over time, such habits can evolve into long-term self-regulation skills that benefit young individuals into adolescence and adulthood.

In many families, the presence of devices during meals is explicitly discouraged to ensure that attention remains focused on family dialogue and shared stories. If these rules are breached, parents may intervene by requesting that the child pause their digital activity. However, this form of regulation is ideally applied in an age-sensitive and developmentally appropriate manner. As children grow older, direct control may give way to dialogic approaches that emphasize the value of quality time and personal responsibility.

Firm actions, such as temporarily setting aside mobile phones, may be necessary when agreed-upon rules are repeatedly ignored. While effective in the short term, this approach

should be complemented by creative and constructive alternatives. Parents can offer engaging offline activities such as art projects, music practice, or collaborative tasks that stimulate imagination and reduce dependence on virtual platforms. The ultimate goal is to help children view digital engagement as a choice rather than a necessity, and to encourage them to find fulfillment beyond their screens (Boyd, 2014).

4.2.2. Raising Awareness of Social Media Risks

Amid the accelerating wave of digitalization, the family represents one of the most vulnerable social institutions exposed to the risks associated with social media use. Although digital platforms offer unprecedented convenience in communication and access to information, their latent dangers must not be overlooked. Thus, a crucial preventive strategy within the family context is raising collective awareness about the potential threats posed by social media. This awareness is vital not only for children and adolescents, but also for parents, many of whom may lack digital literacy or a full understanding of the complex risks hidden behind smartphone and computer screens.

One practical implementation of this strategy is through family-based education about common forms of digital risk. Parents bear the responsibility of introducing and explaining various online threats, such as cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, digital fraud, privacy breaches, and the influence of anonymous or radical online actors. These discussions should be framed in age-appropriate language, fostering critical awareness without generating undue fear (Boyd, 2014).

Such efforts must be complemented by open and supportive communication within the family. Children should feel safe disclosing their digital experiences without the fear of reprimand or judgment. Rather than resorting to prohibitive measures, parents are encouraged to engage in empathetic, dialogical conversations. For instance, when a child receives an unsolicited message from a stranger online, instead of immediately confiscating the device, parents can use the moment to explore the risks and collaboratively develop safe responses (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011).

In parallel, families should cultivate healthy digital habits. Children must be taught how to protect their online privacy by refraining from sharing sensitive information such as home addresses, real-time locations, personal identifiers, or private photos. Parents, in turn, need to stay informed about security settings, account privacy options, and technological developments. Interestingly, the reverse can also occur, digitally proficient children may assist parents in understanding and navigating social media security tools, creating a mutual learning environment (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Joint family activities, such as reviewing search histories or adjusting privacy settings together, can serve as valuable opportunities to promote vigilance and shared responsibility. These actions should not be framed as surveillance, but rather as proactive steps conducted transparently to build trust and foster a sense of collective accountability. When children experience discomfort or harm online, they will be more inclined to seek support from within the family, viewing it as a primary source of resolution.

Awareness-building can also be integrated into daily life through reflective discussions on current digital issues. News reports on online crimes or viral incidents can serve as conversation starters to discuss the importance of careful engagement in digital spaces. By connecting abstract digital risks to real-life events, children are more likely to internalize these lessons and apply them meaningfully.

Finally, fostering awareness requires embedding digital literacy and critical thinking into family life. Children should be equipped with the skills to detect misinformation, differentiate between verified facts and opinion-based content, and understand how social media algorithms influence their perceptions, emotions, and self-concept. A reflective, media-literate mindset, when nurtured from an early age, can empower children to become discerning and resilient users of digital technology.

4.2.3. Communication as a Solution to the Impact of Social Media

In today's increasingly complex digital landscape, social media serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a potential source of conflict within family life. The rapid and often unfiltered dissemination of information has blurred the boundaries between private and public spheres. In such contexts, family communication becomes a crucial frontline strategy in mitigating the adverse impacts of social media. A lack of open and healthy communication can result in misunderstandings, emotional tension, and even alienation among family members. Thus, communication functions not merely as a channel for message transmission, but as a foundational element in sustaining familial harmony in the digital era (S. M. Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Effective intra-family communication must be rooted in honesty, empathy, and mutual respect. Parents should avoid adopting an authoritarian or overly patronizing tone when addressing social media-related concerns. Instead, fostering a safe and open communicative atmosphere encourages children to speak freely about their online experiences. Informal settings, such as shared meals, casual walks, or watching the news together, can be leveraged to initiate light yet meaningful discussions about digital risks, including misinformation, algorithmic manipulation, or social comparison pressures. Constructive, non-judgmental dialogue facilitates two-way reflection and nurtures emotional resilience (Boyd, 2014).

Furthermore, communicative strategies should be responsive to the child's developmental stage. Rather than solely emphasizing the dangers of digital media, parents are advised to acknowledge its creative and educational potential. This includes recognizing children's aspirations to produce content, participate in online learning platforms, or engage in professional networking. In this way, communication transcends its supervisory function and becomes a form of emotional and intellectual support. Children who feel respected and involved are more likely to accept boundaries and advice from their caregivers (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011).

Notably, social media can also be repurposed as a means of enhancing family communication. Parents and children may exchange uplifting content, humorous memes, or educational resources via family messaging groups. Shared activities inspired by social media, such as planning trips, creating family videos, or exploring mutual interests, can reinforce familial bonds. When utilized intentionally, social media bridges the digital world and everyday family life, creating moments of connection and positivity.

Beyond its role in prevention, communication also serves a therapeutic function, particularly for children and adolescents experiencing stress due to their engagement with social media. Many young users internalize unrealistic portrayals of success, beauty, or happiness displayed online, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy or distress. It is essential for parents to contextualize these portrayals, explaining that much of the content on social media is curated, filtered, and unrepresentative of everyday reality. Validating children's emotions and providing psychological reassurance are key steps in helping them process and cope with these pressures (Turkle, 2011).

Crucially, communication must be inclusive and sensitive to ensure that each family member feels acknowledged and valued. Children, adolescents, and adults each bring distinct perspectives and experiences in their digital interactions. When dialogue is characterized by mutual listening and balanced expression, a culture of open communication and respect is cultivated. Over time, this strengthens interpersonal relationships and positions the family as a resilient, adaptive social unit in the face of ongoing digital challenges.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media, as an integral component of digital technological development, has tangible effects on social cohesion within families. Its use has been shown to challenge familial relationships, as indicated by shifting patterns of interaction, diminished expressions of care, a heightened emphasis on personal privacy, and the emergence of trust-related tensions. These dynamics reflect a broader weakening of the interpersonal bonds that traditionally underpinned family life.

Nonetheless, families are not merely passive recipients of these changes. The findings reveal that families employ a variety of strategies to mitigate the adverse consequences of social media. These include managing digital usage responsibly, fostering awareness of associated risks, and reinforcing internal communication to address emerging conflicts. Such initiatives illustrate the family's adaptive capacity to sustain social cohesion amid rapid digital transformation.

In essence, while social media may disrupt traditional forms of familial interaction, families possess the agency to counteract these effects through deliberate communication, internal education, and collective regulation of technology use. These insights offer a valuable foundation for designing digital literacy initiatives and public policies aimed at reinforcing the protective and connective functions of the family in an increasingly digital society.

6. Acknowledgment

This research was made possible through the support and contributions of various parties. The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Andalas University, for providing research funding through the 2024 DIPA Fund. Appreciation is also extended to all informants who generously shared their time and insights during the interviews. Special thanks go to the student enumerators for their valuable assistance, as well as to all others whose contributions, though not mentioned individually, were instrumental in the completion of this study.

7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest regarding this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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