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Analysis of the Communication Crisis Between Parents and Children Amid the Dominance of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of social media has reshaped communication patterns within modern families, significantly influencing how parents and children interact in their daily lives. While social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp provide convenience, entertainment, and a sense of connectedness, they have also contributed to a growing communication crisis within households. Many children increasingly engage with their digital devices, while parents similarly divide their attention between family responsibilities and online activities. This shift reduces face-to-face interactions, weakens emotional bonds, and widens generational communication gaps. This study analyzes the communication crisis caused by excessive social media dominance, exploring its impact on emotional closeness, family dynamics, and conflict emergence. It further examines the social and psychological factors that shape communication breakdowns between parents and children. The findings highlight that miscommunication often stems from digital distractions, differences in technological literacy, and shifting communication styles influenced by online culture. The study offers insights into how families can restore communication harmony through healthy digital habits, open dialogue, parental role modeling, and quality offline interaction. Strengthening emotional bonds is essential to prevent long-term relational damage and to ensure that technological advancement does not erode the foundation of parent–child relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology has brought profound changes to human life. One of the most visible consequences is the emergence of various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp, which now shape daily habits and communication patterns across all generations. Social media has evolved beyond a simple tool for interaction and entertainment; for many people, it has become a lifestyle, a space for identity formation, and even a primary source of information. Children and adolescents, in particular, have grown up in a digital ecosystem where emotional expression, social interaction, and academic engagement are mediated through screens.

Despite its many benefits, social media also creates serious challenges, especially within families. Parents and children increasingly spend more time on their respective devices than interacting with one another. Parents may be preoccupied with work-related messages or personal online activities, while children immerse themselves in online games, influencers, and digital communities. As a result, face-to-face interaction gradually diminishes, emotional intimacy weakens, and communication gaps widen. Over time, misunderstandings and conflicts arise because verbal and nonverbal cues essential components of healthy communication are replaced by short messages, emojis, or online content.

This emerging condition is referred to as a communication crisis within families, where the relationship between parents and children becomes strained due to the overwhelming dominance of social media. This issue is not merely a technological problem, but also a social, emotional, and psychological phenomenon that demands deeper analysis. The communication crisis reflects not only reduced interaction but also a shift in collective values: children often perceive the online world as more engaging, while parents struggle to keep up with rapidly changing digital trends.

Furthermore, the communication gap between generations is exacerbated by differences in technological literacy. Today's children are digital natives who fluently navigate online platforms, while many parents are digital immigrants who often lag behind in understanding the dynamics of social media. Children may feel misunderstood or monitored excessively, while parents may feel excluded or frustrated. These mismatches in digital behavior create emotional distance and weaken the sense of mutual trust.

In addition to digital distractions, lifestyle changes also contribute to reduced family interaction. Busy work schedules, school demands, and societal pressure for constant productivity create limited opportunities for meaningful communication. As family members become increasingly absorbed in their individual routines and digital spaces, the home environment shifts from a place of shared emotional experiences into a series of parallel lives under the same roof.

Social media also influences values, attitudes, and expectations. Children are exposed to idealized lifestyles, instant gratification, and external validation, while parents often uphold traditional communication norms based on discipline, respect, and face-to-face dialogue. These contrasting value systems intensify misunderstandings, leading to disagreements and emotional withdrawal. Over time, emotional detachment becomes normalized, and communication breakdown becomes harder to repair.

This condition is alarming because effective communication is the core foundation of family harmony. When communication weakens, children become more vulnerable to loneliness, behavioral problems, risky digital behavior, or emotional instability. Parents, meanwhile, may feel helpless or disconnected, unsure how to rebuild closeness with their children. The communication crisis thus requires urgent and comprehensive study to identify preventive measures and effective solutions.

In the midst of unavoidable technological advancement, families must adapt by developing healthy digital communication patterns while preserving emotional connection. The goal is not to reject technology, but to balance its use with genuine interpersonal interaction. This study seeks to explore the roots of communication crisis, the influence of social media, and appropriate strategies to restore harmony within parent–child relationships in the digital era.

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METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at analyzing the communication crisis between parents and children amid the dominance of social media. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of interpersonal dynamics, emotional patterns, and communication behaviors that cannot be captured through numerical data alone. Through this method, the study interprets the meaning behind interactions, perceptions, and relational changes that occur within families living in a digitally saturated environment.

The primary data source consists of literature, journal articles, psychological studies, communication theories, and empirical findings related to family communication, digital behavior, and social media influence. Secondary sources include books on interpersonal communication, parenting, digital literacy, and sociological perspectives on family dynamics. A literature review method is used to examine current theories and previous findings that support the analysis of communication crises in modern families.

The data collection technique involves documentation and library research. Various academic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Research Gate, and institutional repositories are used to gather scholarly articles published in the last ten years. This time frame is chosen to ensure the relevance of the discussion to the rapid evolution of digital platforms and changing communication patterns associated with media technology.

In analyzing the data, the study applies thematic analysis. This method allows the identification of recurring themes such as emotional distancing, digital dependence, parental digital illiteracy, generational gaps, and conflicting expectations within family communication.

Thematic analysis helps classify the root causes, contributing factors, and potential consequences of communication breakdowns. It also enables the synthesis of theoretical and empirical insights to produce a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

To maintain validity, the study triangulates theories from communication science, psychology, and sociology. Cross-checking concepts across multiple disciplines ensures the reliability of the interpretations and avoids one-sided conclusions. Additionally, the study compares findings from different regions and cultural contexts to provide a broader perspective regarding how digital dominance influences communication behavior across diverse family structures. Overall, this research method allows a robust and holistic exploration of the communication crisis between parents and children. By relying on qualitative interpretation and extensive literature review, the study builds a strong analytical foundation for understanding how social media reshapes family dynamics in the modern digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. How Does the Dominance of Social Media Influence Family Communication?

Social media significantly influences the daily interaction patterns of individuals and reshapes how families communicate. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and messaging applications have become integral to how children and adolescents express themselves, maintain friendships, and explore personal interests. While these platforms offer benefits such as global communication, easy access to information, and creative opportunities excessive reliance on them often reduces direct interpersonal interaction within the family.

In the context of communication, technology introduces a new form of engagement that prioritizes speed, brevity, and visual stimuli. Communication that used to involve rich non-verbal cues such as eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language has been replaced by emojis, short comments, or passive consumption of online content. This change diminishes the depth of interaction and can result in superficial communication between parents and children. When families lose essential emotional cues, misunderstandings become more likely.

Within the household, parents and children occupy different digital “worlds.” Children tend to spend significant time consuming entertainment content, interacting with friends online, and engaging in digital gaming communities. Parents, on the other hand, may be overwhelmed by professional demands delivered through messaging applications, emails, or digital platforms. Both

parties become absorbed in separate technological bubbles. As the amount of face-to-face interaction declines, the emotional bond weakens and the sense of closeness diminishes.

Research consistently shows that children who grow up with strong digital exposure often prefer online communication over real-world interaction, especially when they feel more validated emotionally through likes, comments, or followers. This creates a form of dependency where digital responses become substitutes for parental attention. Parents may interpret this as disrespectful or disengaged behavior, while children perceive parental concern as interference or criticism of their online autonomy. These contrasting interpretations intensify the communication crisis.

The family, ideally a primary setting for emotional development, becomes fragmented. The role of parents in providing emotional guidance, discipline, and values is weakened when communication is mediated through screens. When parents fail to understand their child's digital life, or when children feel judged for their online activities, both parties retreat further into their respective digital comfort zones. This withdrawal gradually erodes trust, closeness, and mutual understanding.

Moreover, social media introduces external influences that override parental guidance. Children may be exposed to false information, unrealistic standards, unhealthy comparison, and harmful online communities. Without open communication, children are less likely to share their digital experiences or report negative encounters, leaving parents unaware of potential risks. In such cases, the crisis deepens as emotional distance grows.

In the long term, families that experience communication crises may encounter emotional instability, behavioral issues, and weakened family cohesion. Effective communication is central to building trust, resolving conflicts, and nurturing emotional health. When social media becomes the dominant mode of interaction, these processes are interrupted. Parents must therefore adapt their communication approach, show genuine interest in their child's digital world, and foster healthy media habits. Otherwise, technological dominance will continue to overshadow the natural bonds that hold families together.

2. What Factors Cause Communication Crises Within Families?

Several interrelated factors contribute to the communication crisis between parents and children in the digital age. Although social media plays a major role, the roots of the crisis extend to deeper psychological, relational, cultural, and structural elements.

First, communication breakdown is heavily influenced by the quality of the marital relationship. A harmonious family environment relies on healthy communication between husband and wife. When parents argue frequently, show emotional instability, or lack intimacy, the family's communication structure becomes fragile. Children living in such environments may withdraw emotionally, seek comfort in the digital world, or avoid interaction altogether. These behaviors reflect emotional displacement caused by parental conflict.

The background of each parent also shapes family communication dynamics. Individuals raised in dysfunctional families or those without strong role models may struggle to express affection, resolve conflict, or communicate empathetically with their children. Emotional immaturity, lack of conflict management skills, and unresolved trauma manifest in communication styles that are rigid, overcontrolling, dismissive, or emotionally distant. When such parents face children who are immersed in digital culture, gaps widen further.

Economic pressures also contribute to the communication crisis. Parents working long hours or juggling multiple responsibilities may have limited time and energy to engage in meaningful conversations with their children. The rise in living costs, work stress, and financial instability heightens emotional strain, leaving parents with less patience and attentiveness. Consequently, children may feel neglected and turn to social media for support, validation, and social interaction. This cycle strengthens the digital divide within the family.

Generational differences further exacerbate communication problems. Today's children grow up as digital natives who are comfortable with virtual expression, multitasking, and rapid information flow. Parents, however, often belong to generations with traditional communication norms that emphasize respect, obedience, and in-person discussion. These contrasting frameworks create

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misunderstanding: parents perceive children as disrespectful or overly dependent on technology, while children view parents as out of touch, overly strict, or intrusive.

Cultural expectations also play a role. In many societies, including Indonesia, parental authority is highly valued. This often results in communication patterns that are hierarchical rather than dialogic. Children may feel afraid to express emotions, concerns, or personal challenges. When communication is dominated by commands, criticism, or moral lectures, children seek alternative spaces often online where they feel heard and accepted. As emotional needs shift to digital communities, parental connection weakens.

Another major factor is poor digital literacy among parents. Many parents do not understand the platforms their children use, the risks associated with online interaction, or the ways in which digital culture shapes communication patterns. This lack of understanding leads to misjudgments, overreactions, or strict prohibitions. Instead of bridging communication gaps, these actions create resistance and further reduce intimacy. Children may hide their online lives, increasing secrecy and fostering distrust.

Furthermore, communication crises often stem from mismatched expectations. Parents expect children to follow traditional norms, while children expect parents to be more flexible and emotionally supportive. When these expectations are not met, frustration grows. Without effective dialogue, misunderstandings escalate into long-term emotional tension.

Taken together, these factors demonstrate that the communication crisis within families is not solely a technological issue it is a multifaceted relational problem. Social media merely amplifies pre-existing weaknesses. Strengthening communication therefore requires addressing emotional, psychological, cultural, and structural dynamics simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The communication crisis between parents and children is increasingly evident amid the dominance of social media in modern life. Although digital platforms offer convenience and access to information, they also reduce face-to-face interaction, weaken emotional intimacy, and disrupt the natural flow of communication within families. Differences in digital behavior, generational values, and communication styles intensify misunderstandings and emotional distance. To address this crisis, parents must actively adapt to the digital era by serving as role models for healthy technology use, fostering open dialogue, and providing balanced supervision. Establishing family digital rules and prioritizing quality offline time are essential steps toward rebuilding emotional closeness. With the right approach, families can bridge communication gaps and maintain strong, harmonious relationships despite the challenges posed by technological advancement.

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