Connected: Social Media Use and Quality Family Time

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Social Work

By

Stacy Dobbs

May 2020
The graduate project of Stacy Dobbs is approved:

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Dr. Jodi Brown, Chair  Date

California State University, Northridge
Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family: my parents, who taught me the value of education and have been my biggest supporters from day one, my siblings, who are my best friends, and my children, whose patience and understanding made my journey through grad school possible. Thank you for loving me, laughing with me and believing in me!
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Online Survey</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Connected: Social Media Use and Quality Family Time

By

Stacy Dobbs

Master of Social Work

Purpose: This study explored the correlation between social media use and quality family time, attempting to fill the gaps in previous studies. Research question: What is the relationship between social media use and quality time spent together in families? Methods: Anonymous online survey of adults (N=100) with at least one family member residing at home. Social media use was measured in time spent on social media and feelings about social media use within families. Quality family time was measured in family activities, meaningful conversations, and feelings of family connection. Results: Lower levels of family connection were related to higher levels of perceived time spent using social media ($r=-.261, p<.009$) and greater annoyance with others’ use of social media ($r=-.355, p<.000$). Discussion: Individuals who spend less time on social media report feeling more connected to their families and spending more quality time together. These findings support previous studies that found social media use may weaken family connection and negatively affect family relationships and communication.

Keywords: family connection, quality family time, family communication, social media use, social media use in families
Introduction

What does it mean to be connected and why is it important? As humans we seek to feel connected to something, often to each other. Today, people are increasingly connecting with others virtually via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat. With the increased use of social media platforms, individuals and families often experience fewer interpersonal interactions and less connection.

One recent study found that “internet use at home was negatively related to time spent with family” (Sultana, 2017, p. 48). Social media use in families also poses the risk of decreased face-to-face interaction and the weakening of family ties (Sultana, 2017). Quality time spent together is vital for the survival and integrity of the family, and for families to feel connected with each other (Unal, 2017), but many families may not be aware of the potential influence social media use by family members may be having on family cohesiveness.
Literature Review

Few research studies exist that specifically examine the impact of social media on quality family time (Sultana, 2017). For purposes of this study, research literature was reviewed on internet and social media use in families, quality family time, and, when possible, the correlation between the two.

Quality Family Time

The family is the first social institution to which we belong, making communication and interaction among family members vital for social development (Unal, 2017). Efficient communication in the family offers children “a healthy medium for socializing” (Unal, 2017, p. 551). Quality time spent in families can also help build and improve relationships among family members (Chitakunye & Takhar, 2014). Quality time implies an interaction or communication, including “paying full and undivided attention” to each other (Chitakunye & Takhar, 2014, p. 1165). The quality time marital partners spend together is often linked to quality of life, and face-to-face interaction is critical for the quality of their relationship (Glorieux, Minnen & Tienoven, 2010). Family closeness usually includes “communication, shared time and emotional bonding” (Williams & Merten, 2011, p. 152). Padilla-Walker, Coyne and Fraser (2012) described family connectedness as “a close, warm, loving positive relationship between parents and children” (p. 429). They defined quality time as “family dinners, family walks, playing an interactive video game, or watching a movie together” (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2012, p. 429). According to Chitakunye and Takhar (2014), quality time in families can
include outings, playing games, sporting events, vacations, eating meals
together, and face-to-face conversations. Unal (2017) emphasized the
importance of being able to see each other’s gestures and facial expressions in
family communication. Mullan and Chazitheochari (2019) defined family time
as shared meals or leisure activities “deliberately aimed to foster a sense of
family togetherness” (p. 796).

The Internet and Social Media

The internet has changed our lives and our communication patterns
(Unal, 2017). Social networking sites have become increasingly popular in
recent years (Sultana, 2017), and for many people social media use has become
an integral part of life (Unal, 2017). One study found that “approximately three
quarters of American adults own a smartphone with one in four reporting going
online constantly and 43% online several times a day” (Mullan &
Chatzitheochari, 2019, p. 795). In 2010, two-thirds of adolescents and half of
adults were using social networking sites (Williams & Merten, 2011).
Adolescents today are viewed as “media saturated,” as they spend more than 7
hours per day on average going online (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Fraser, Fellows
& Day, 2014). One study found that the average person uses social media 2 ½
hours per day (Dinleyici, Carman, Ozturk & Sahin-Dagli, 2016). Unal (2017)
found that internet users spent an average of seven hours online per day, half of
that on social media, and that Facebook users spent an average of 2-3 hours per
day on Facebook.
Social Media use and Family Connectedness

There has been a major shift in the way families experience media (Padilla-Walker et al., 2012). In the past, families might watch a movie together while eating popcorn; families today, however, often watch a movie together while simultaneously texting, going online and/or checking social media sites (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2012). Devices, such as smartphones, have “become an inseparable part of family quality time” (Chitakunye & Takhar, 2014, p. 1172). Communication in the family can be impacted by social media when it takes focus and attention away from family members (Unal, 2017). Being able to communicate within the family system “candidly and frequently,” and participating in “shared activities are of the utmost importance when it comes to survival and integrity of the family” (Unal, 2017, p. 560). In Unal’s (2017) study, most participants felt that spending time on Facebook adversely affected family communication. Increased internet use was linked to greater isolation, loneliness and depression, as well as decreased in-person social interactions (Khalid, 2017). Social networking sites are changing the nature of social relationships and have been linked to the weakening of ties to friends and family (Khalid, 2017) and negatively correlated to family connection (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2012).

Some studies have associated mobile devices and the internet with increased family conflict and decreased family time (Mullan & Chatzitheochari, 2019). Chitakunye and Takhar (2014) found that family mealtime was negatively impacted by mobile devices and that their use had
“the potential to alter the flow of family quality time” (p. 1163). Mullan and Chatzitheochari (2019) also found that mobile devices distracted family members during meals and interrupted important interactions. Mullan and Chatzitheochari (2019) found that parents and children frequently used devices, such as smartphones, during shared activities, which contaminated or eroded family quality time.

Internet use “results in less emotional bonding among real life relations” (Khalid, 2017, p. 5). Among adolescents, heavy internet use negatively correlated to perceived family closeness (Mesch, 2003). Leung and Lee (2005) concluded that online relationships are less substantial and less sustaining than in-person relationships, and that more time spent online takes away from connectedness to friends and family in-person (Leung & Lee, 2005). While some social media use can foster communication and bring families closer together when physically apart, social media use while together tends to reduce family quality time, family connectedness, and perceived closeness (Williams & Merten, 2011).

Sultana (2017) found that “low internet use was associated with better relationships with parents and friends than was high internet use” (p. 48). The adolescents who participated in the study reported that internet use did not help improve their relationship with their parents and that internet usage detracted from family time (Sultana, 2017). Sultana (2017) also found a strong negative association between use of social networking sites and parental cohesion and
concluded that overuse of social media leads to a decline in family relationships by decreasing family time spent together and weakening of family cohesion.

Interestingly, only one study positively correlated social media use and family connectedness. The study of 633 families, with at least one parent and at least one adolescent, found that heightened levels of media use are correlated to decreased family communication, however they posited that social media use in families can be positive in many instances (Coyne et al., 2014). Study participants were interviewed and asked questions about positive media use with the family (ie. watching movies together) and questions about family functioning, adolescent disclosure to parents, and parental involvement (Coyne et al., 2014). Coyne et al. (2014) proposed that the use of social media increased communication and connectivity in families by enabling parents to connect with their teenagers online when connecting in person may be difficult. However, the study concluded that social media use also has the potential to be a negative, isolating influence on individuals and “can even drive wedges into family relationships” (Coyne et al., 2014, p. 682).

Previous studies have focused primarily on a single age group or a single social media site to determine the correlation between social media use and quality family time. The study by Sultana (2017) used a sample of 384 youth to study their social media use and its impact on the family. The study by Unal (2017) used a broader study sample consisting of 346 children, young adults, and parents but only focused on the use of a single social media site (Facebook) and its impact on family communication, not family cohesion, which does not
take into account the total amount of time individuals spend on social media or the overall connectedness of the family. Both studies provide a limited perspective on the correlation between social media use and quality family time. The study by Coyne et al. (2014) focused on the ways that all forms of media can be used for family members to communicate and connect positively with each other but only offered a limited perspective on social media specifically. According to Coyne et al. (2014), the study did not distinguish between entertainment and social media in the quantitative portion of the study, suggesting that “future research may wish to examine whether entertainment and social media represent unique predictors of adolescent and parent outcomes” (p. 682).

**Aims and objectives**

Family scholars have identified increased technology use as something that is likely to influence family functioning, however limited research exists on what impact social media use may have on families (Mullan & Chatzitheochari, 2019). According to recent research, increased “use of social networking sites in households” correlates to people “spending less quality time with their family and friends” (Sultana, 2017, p. 46). Sultana (2017) concluded “that there is a strong negative association between the variables social networking site use and cohesion with parents” (p. 52). Unal (2017) found that “Facebook usage habits limit the quality time [participants] spend as a family” (p. 562). The purpose of this study is to attempt to fill the gaps in the studies by Sultana (2017) in India and Unal (2017) in Turkey using similar methodology but with a study sample of adults in the United States and in a study that measures overall family connectedness and use of multiple social media sites. The current
study aims to add to the limited research literature exploring the correlation between social media use and quality time spent together in families. The overarching research question for the current study is: “what is the relationship between social media use and quality time spent together in families?”
Method

Participants

The study sample (N=100) included healthy adults, ages 18 and older who live in a “family” of at least two people. For the purposes of this study, “family” was defined as two or more people living together who are connected by birth, adoption or psychological, economic, or historical ties (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015).

Participants were recruited by posting on social networking sites Facebook and Instagram. The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Northridge identified this study as exempt.

Measures

The 49-item study survey had six sections: (1) social media habits, (2) feelings about family connection and social media use within the family, (3) time spent on social media use, (4) quality time spent with family member(s), (5) demographics, and (6) a final open-ended question about the participant’s thoughts about social media use and how it may or may not impact their family life. The survey was self-designed by this researcher based on the literature and using similar questions as found in the Unal (2017) and Sultana (2017) studies, as established and tested scale measure for family connection was not found in the available literature (See Appendix A). In order to test for internal reliability of the survey measures, Cronbach’s Alpha test was used in SPSS, which produced a result of .898 for the family connection scale and .875 for the social media use scales. Ideal alpha scores are above .90 and scores above .80 are considered acceptable (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The alpha scores of .898 and .875 suggest an acceptable level of internal reliability for the family connection and social media use measures. Although the study is based on existing research and measures of the same concept, which offers
some degree of validity (Rubin & Babbie, 2014), the measurement scales used in this study were unable to be tested over time given the limited time frame, resulting in a weaker study design, which affects the validity of the study. To test for validity of the measurement scales for family connection and social media use, a factor analysis of the scale was run in SPSS which indicated that several of the factors (variables) were valid measure of the variables.

**Social Media.** The independent variable of social media use was defined as time spent viewing content on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites such as SnapChat or Twitter, on participants’ smartphones. Survey participants were asked which social media platforms they had open accounts with, what type of devices they used to check social media, and what time of day they typically checked social media. Time spent on social media was measured via Facebook and Instagram mobile apps that track users’ average daily usage. Survey participants were asked to self-report their social media use through the survey by responding to the questions: 1. How often do you check social media? 2. According to your Facebook account, what is your average daily usage for the past week? And 3. According to your Instagram account, what is your average daily usage for the past week? Higher scores indicate more time spent on social media.

The second section of the survey gathered participants’ feelings about their own social media use and that of their family member(s) using Likert scaling, where participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the given statements as: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. A scale was created to measure Perceived Time on Social Media by combining the questions: I find it difficult to limit my social media, I spend too much time on social media, I feel that my family member(s) spend too much time on social media. A second scale was created to measure Annoyance with Social Media Use in Families by combining the
questions: Social media distracts me from paying attention to my family member(s), I feel annoyed by the amount of time my family member(s) spend on social media, My family member(s) social media usage at home interferes with spending time as a family, My social media usage at home interferes with spending time as a family, My family member(s) ignore me or other family member(s) while on social media, My family member(s) become distracted by social media during our conversations.

Quality Time. The dependent variable of quality time spent was defined as positive, meaningful face-to-face interactions with at least one other family member. Quality time was measured in times per day spent having positive, meaningful face-to-face conversations with at least one family member and number of times a positive, meaningful family activity with at least one other family member took place in a typical week. Survey participants were also asked which activities they participated in with at least one other family member, given the choices of: eating a meal together, playing a game together, reading a book together, movie night, exercising together, dining out, attending religious services, watching/attending a sporting event, and other activities determined by the survey participant. Additional questions explored participants’ feelings about level of connectedness and cohesion in the family using Likert scaling, where participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the given statements as: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. A Family Connection scale was created using the questions: I feel that my emotional needs are being met by my family member(s), I am attentive to my family member(s), I feel connected to my family, My family members are attentive to my problems, I feel supported by my family member(s), I feel satisfied with my family life.
Research Design

The design of this study was exploratory, and the methodology was quantitative using a structured online survey to collect data anonymously. Data for the study was gathered via an online Qualtrics survey. Exploratory research is useful when the study subject is relatively new and unstudied (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This study on the correlation between social media use and quality time spent in families falls into this category as few studies exist on this specific subject (Sultana, 2017). Using a quantitative method, this study gathered information on the independent variable of social media use in correlation to the dependent variable of quality family time. Qualitative data were also gathered in the final survey question.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Pearson’s r correlation was used to explore relationships between ratio-level variables. T-tests were used to compare groups, and chi-square analysis was used to examine dichotomous variables.

Procedure

Research began with securing approval through CSUN’s IRB. Study participants were recruited by posting an advertisement and link to Qualtrics survey on Facebook and Instagram. The post with the advertising link was made public, which allowed others to post and share the survey with their social media followers. The survey advertisement post was shared 14 times by other Facebook users. The survey was made available on social media sites Facebook and Instagram from January 9, 2020, to January 25, 2020. The link to the survey was initially posted on January 9, 2020 and resulted in 59 responses. The link was reposted on January 14, 2020, with 23 responses arriving thereafter. The survey link was posted a final time on January 21, 2020, which
resulted in an additional 30 responses. Surveys took an average of 16 minutes
\((M=17.22, SD=29.05)\) to complete.
Results

Out of 112 responses to the survey, 12 participants completed 43% or less of the survey and were excluded from the data analysis. Data from the remaining participants (N=100) was used to run statistical analyses. The sample was comprised of primarily White, college-educated, married women (see Table 1).

Table 1. 
Survey Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>13 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>26 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>33 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>13 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>8 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86 (86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>85 (85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>80 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of School Completed</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>20 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>40 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>27 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>64 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>19 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Adults in Household</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>11 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11 (11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>55 (55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>22 (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7 (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Children in Household</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>42 (42)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>18 (18)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>17 (17)</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>9 (9)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>11 (11)</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>3 (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Checking Social Media</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
<th>29 (29)</th>
<th>Multiple Times/Day</th>
<th>60 (60)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devices used to Check Social Media</th>
<th>Smartphones</th>
<th>90 (90)</th>
<th>Tablets</th>
<th>14 (14)</th>
<th>PC or Laptop</th>
<th>44 (44)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Social Media Accounts</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>94 (94)</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>74 (74)</th>
<th>SnapChat</th>
<th>33 (33)</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>24 (24)</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>6 (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Daily Face-to-Face Conversations with Family Member(s)</th>
<th>0-1 time</th>
<th>9 (9)</th>
<th>2-3 times</th>
<th>41 (41)</th>
<th>4-5 times</th>
<th>17 (17)</th>
<th>6 or more times</th>
<th>33 (33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of weekly family activities</th>
<th>0-5 activities</th>
<th>37 (37)</th>
<th>6-10 activities</th>
<th>32 (32)</th>
<th>11-15 activities</th>
<th>13 (13)</th>
<th>16 or more activities</th>
<th>18 (18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most common family activities</th>
<th>Eating meal</th>
<th>98 (98)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

15
Participants (n=85) reported spending an average of 53 minutes (M=53.28, SD=44.39) per day on Facebook and participants (n=72) reported spending an average of 27 minutes (M=27.50, SD=35.42) per day on Instagram.

**Bivariate Analyses**

Pearson’s r correlation was used to explore the relationship between social media use and family connection. Lower levels of family connection were related to higher levels of perceived time spent using social media and greater annoyance with others’ use of social media (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived Time on Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family Connection</td>
<td>-.261**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Annoyance with Social Media Use</td>
<td>.700**</td>
<td>-.355**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Time spent with Family</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>.551**</td>
<td>-.226*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time spent on Social Media</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .01 (2-tailed).
* p < .05 (2-tailed).

The qualitative data gathered from the final survey question “Please share your thoughts about how social media may (or may not) impact your family life. Feel free to write as little or as
much as you want,” was consistent with the quantitative data. Out of 64 participants \( n=64 \) who responded to the question, 21 (32%) responded that they felt social media negatively impacts their family life and/or connection to and/or communication with family members.

- “Sometimes my kids tell me that I’m not really listening to them when I’m looking at my phone. I could do more and be more present if I spent less time on social media."
- “It gets in the way of quality family time at home.”
- “It does make it difficult to have meaningful, undivided conversations with teenagers or even a spouse.”
- “Social media tends to shut family members off from each other. And tends to make it so less family conversations are held and fewer family activities happen.”
- “Although I use it, I feel it takes away from face to face communication and eye contact.”

Fifteen respondents (23%) expressed concern with their own or a family member’s social media usage or expressed thoughts about the negative impact social media can have on individual family members.

- “It definitely impacts my life in a not-so-good way. Need to set better boundaries”
- “My son (17) recently opened an Instagram account. He gets sucked into it and was exposed to bad images.”
- “All family members except one are very good at managing social media use in my household. The one that struggles is a teenage girl with an undiagnosed social media addiction. The rest of us can see her struggles with social media and urge
her to use it less, but she refuses to acknowledge it as the cause of her anxiety, depression, etc.”

- “I use TikTok way more than I want to.”

Five respondents (7%) shared that the “positives equal the negatives” of social media use and that they were in control of their usage. Three respondents (4%) shared that social media has enabled them to connect better with family members with whom they live.

- “We spend a lot of time on our phones, but I believe social media brings us together as much as it might distract us. We have teenagers who spend big parts of their lives at school and with friends: we get to share in their activities as they share on social media sites. I can watch them interacting with other friends online…Every Sunday we compare screen time reports and make jokes about who is up or down! We share jokes and memes from Twitter and Instagram: in a way it gives us a shared language to communicate with.”

Eleven respondents (17%) reported that social media helped them stay connected with family and friends outside of their immediate family. This was consistent with the quantitative data analysis as 84% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “Social media helps me feel connected to other people outside of my immediate family.”

- “It helps me stay in touch with my extended family and friends.”

- “I love that I can easily share pictures of my kids on Instagram and Facebook with grandparents, great-grandparents, and other family that live in other states and countries. And I love seeing pictures of my family that live elsewhere.”
Discussion

The qualitative and quantitative data gathered and analyzed in this study found negative correlations between perception of social media use and family connection, and annoyance with social media use and family connection, which support results found by Sultana (2017) that social media use may weaken family connection and negatively affect relationships between family members. The findings of this study also indicated support for Unal’s (2017) findings that communication in families can be negatively impacted by social media use, as many study participants felt spending time on social media adversely affected family communication. The qualitative data gathered in this study was also consistent with the study results found by Coyne et al. (2014) that media use is negatively correlated to family communication and connection.

However, the results of this study found no direct correlation between actual time spent on social media and actual time spent with the family, nor did they support Unal’s (2017) findings that Facebook users spend an average of 2-3 hours per day on Facebook. One explanation for the lack of correlation may be systematic bias in which some participants of this study may have felt uncomfortable reporting higher levels of social media use and/or lower levels of family connection and quality family time. Another explanation may be confusion among participants in figuring out how to find their actual time spent on social media within the Facebook and Instagram apps, as some participants answered with their estimated time on social media by writing the word “about” before the number. Yet another explanation may be that as digital technologies, such as smartphones, and social media have become more integrated into our lives the very nature of family connection may be changing. There was some support for this final explanation in the findings of this study as the data showed that younger participants were less annoyed by social media use within the family than were older participants.
Some qualitative data of this study also supported results of Coyne et al. (2014) that social media use in families can be positive in some instances. Coyne et al. (2014) proposed that the use of social media increased communication and connectivity in families by enabling parents to connect with their teenagers online when connecting in person may be difficult. This assertion appears to be supported by three participants of this study who indicated social media helps them connect to their teenage and adult children. However, Coyne et al. (2014) concluded that social media use also has the potential to “drive wedges into family relationships” (p. 682), which is consistent with the negative correlations found between variables in this study, and much of the qualitative data gathered.

Limitations

This study has several potential limitations that should be considered. First, the study sample lacked diversity, as a large majority of participants were Caucasian, most were female, and all were college-educated. Lack of diversity in race, gender, and educational attainment can lead to results which are less generalizable to larger populations.

Second, researcher did not use established measurement scales which contributed to results which may lack reliability and validity. Prior to the start of this study, researcher was unable to find an available standardized measure that fit the parameters of this study topic. Further testing of the measures used in this study would increase the reliability and validity, but given the short time frame of the study, testing was not possible.

Yet another limitation is that participants’ overall social media use was not measured. As of the publication of this study, only Facebook and Instagram apps (used on Smartphones or iPads) track usage and were the only social media sites included in the survey questions measuring time spent on social media. In addition, Facebook usage is only tracked when used on
the app, not the web-based program, which can be accessed on both Laptops and PCs. While 44% of participants reported checking social media on a PC or Laptop, this usage was not factored into their reported average daily usage as it was not able to be easily determined. One participant summed up this potential limitation by surmising in the response to the final question about how social media may (or may not) impact family life, “If Tik Tok & YouTube were included, perhaps the impact is greater than my answers suggest.”

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study provided an interesting perspective and additional information on the subject that may prove useful to future research. Research on family connectedness is vital to the field of social work because much of our work is done with families, especially those facing challenges. It is important for social workers to be aware of the current stressors and challenges that are impacting families today, including factors such as social media use, that may present barriers to family quality time and levels of family connectedness. In addition, social workers can advocate for programs and policies that support and encourage quality family time.

This study raised important questions about the impact and perceived impact of social media use on both family time and family connection in a study sample of adults in the United States. Further research is needed across different cultures and diverse populations to continue to explore this topic and begin to study the changing nature of family connectedness, communication, and quality time in a world of ever-changing technological advancements.
References


APPENDIX A

ONLINE SURVEY

1. California State University, Northridge
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Connected: Social Media Use and Quality Family Time

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Connected: Social Media Use and Quality Family Time, a study conducted by Stacy Dobbs as part of the requirements for the M.S. degree in Social Work. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:
Stacy Dobbs
Department of Social Work
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
stacy.dobbs.517@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Jodi Brown, MSW, Ph.D.
Department of Social Work
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-6364
jodi.brown@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to explore the correlation between social media use and quality time spent together in families.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older and live in a “family” of at least two people. For the purposes of this study, “family” is defined as two or more people living together who are connected by birth, adoption or psychological, economic, or historical ties.

Exclusion Requirements
You are not eligible to participate in this study if you are under age 18 and/or do not live with at least one family member.
**Time Commitment**
This study will involve approximately 15-20 minutes of your time.

**PROCEDURES**
The following procedures will occur: You will complete and submit an online survey about your social media use and your family connectedness.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**
This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. Survey questions have been carefully written to avoid intentionally eliciting feelings of discomfort. The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include mild emotional discomfort such as feeling uneasy, embarrassed or uncomfortable. Participation is voluntary and you can stop the survey at any time should you experience discomfort.

If you experience discomfort, you may contact:
National Alliance on Mental Health:
1-800-950-NAMI
Crisis Text Line – Text NAMI to 741-741

You may seek medical or psychological services from a provider near you at your own expense.

You may visit: http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/ to find a free or low-cost medical facility near you.

**BENEFITS**
**Subject Benefits**
You may not directly benefit from participation in this study.

**Benefits to Others or Society**
Possible benefits to others or society include contributing to the limited research about the effects of social media on the family.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

**COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**
**Compensation for Participation**
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

**Costs**
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
**Subject Identifiable Data**
No identifiable information will be collected about you.
Data Storage
All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected.

Data Access
The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention
The researchers intend to keep the research data for six months, until analysis of the information is completed (by May 2020), and then it will be destroyed.

Mandated Reporting
Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information in the course of conducting this study, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research and Sponsored Programs office, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, by phone at (818) 677-2901 or email at irb@csun.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your participation in the study indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

2. What is your age?
   Under 18
   18-24
   25-34
3. For the purpose of this survey, “family” is defined as two or more people living together who are connected by birth, adoption or psychological, economic, or historical ties. Do you currently live with at least one family member?
   Yes  No

4. Do you use social media sites (ie. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, SnapChat,)
   Yes  No

5. On average, how often do you check social media?
   Never
   Rarely (less than once a month)
   About once per month
   About once per week
   A few times per week
   Every day
   Multiple times each day

6. Which of the following devices do you use to check social media sites? (mark all that apply):
   PC (desktop computer)
   Laptop/Notebook
   Tablet
   Mobile phone
   Other device__________

7. Which of these Social Media sites do you have open accounts with? (mark all that apply)
   Facebook
   Instagram
   SnapChat
   Twitter
   Other (write in)
   None

8. On a typical day, when do you check social media sites?
   When you wake up
   Morning
   Midday
9. For the purpose of this survey, “family” is defined as two or more people living together who are connected by birth, adoption or psychological, economic, or historical ties. Please answer the following questions by marking the answer that best describes your feeling about each statement. Family member(s) include one or more members of your family with whom you live.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a feeling of unity in my family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel satisfied with my family life.</td>
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<td>Quality family time is important to me.</td>
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<td>My family participates in fun activities together.</td>
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<td>I am attentive to my family member(s).</td>
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<td>I have regular face-to-face conversations with my family member(s).</td>
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<td>I enjoy spending time with my family.</td>
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<td>I feel that my emotional needs are being met by my family member(s).</td>
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<td>I feel connected to my family.</td>
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<td>I feel supported by my family member(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality family time is important to my family member(s).</td>
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<td>My family enjoys spending time together.</td>
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<td>My family member(s) are attentive to my problems.</td>
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<td>Social media helps build my family relationships.</td>
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<td>I find it difficult to limit my social media use.</td>
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<td>I enjoy checking social media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey Item</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>My family member(s) social media usage at home interferes with spending time as a family.</td>
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<td>I spend too much time on social media.</td>
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<td>I check social media while I’m spending time with my family member(s).</td>
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<td>I feel annoyed by the amount of time my family member(s) spend on social media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media helps me feel connected to other people outside of my immediate family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media distracts me from paying attention to my family member(s).</td>
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<td>My family member(s) ignore me or other family member(s) while on social media.</td>
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<td>I feel good about the amount of time I spend on social media.</td>
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<td>My family member(s) become distracted by social media during our conversations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My social media usage at home interferes with spending time as a family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that my family member(s) spend too much time on social media.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. Do you use a mobile device (ie iPhone, Android, Samsung) to check social media?  
Yes  No
11. Please answer the following question about the amount of time you spend on Facebook. Typically, you can view your average daily usage for the last week on the Facebook app by going to “settings and privacy” and selecting “Your Time on Facebook.” Alternatively, iPhone users can check Facebook usage via the Screen Time app.
   - According to your Facebook account, what is your average daily usage for the past week? (write in)

12. Please answer the following question about the amount of time you spend on Instagram. Typically, you can view your average daily usage for the last week on the Instagram app by going to your profile, and selecting “Your Activity” from the menu. Alternatively, iPhone users can check Instagram usage via the Screen Time app.
   - According to your Instagram account, what is your average daily usage for the past week? (write in)

13. On a typical day, how many times do you have meaningful, positive face-to-face conversations with at least one family member?
   0-1 time
   2-3 times
   4-5 times
   6 or more times

14. During a typical week, how often do you participate in positive, meaningful family activities with at least one other family member?
   0-5 times
   6-10 times
   11-15 times
   16 or more times

15. During a typical week, which of the following activities do you participate in with at least one other family member? (check all that apply)
   - Eat a meal
   - Play a game
   - Read a book
   - Movie night
   - Exercise
   - Dine out
   - Attend religious services
   - Watch/attend a sporting event
   - Other activities __________
   - None

16. Ethnicity (choose one):
   - Hispanic/Latinx
   - Not Hispanic/Latinx
   - Other (write in)
17. Race (mark all that apply):
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Other________

18. Gender (choose one):
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Gender non-conforming
   - Other: ________

19. Current Marital Status:
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - Never married

20. Highest level of school completed:
   - Less than high school degree
   - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
   - Some college (no degree)
   - 2-year (Associate’s) degree
   - 4-year (Bachelor’s) degree
   - Professional/Graduate degree
   - Post-graduate degree/Doctorate

21. Employment Status (mark all that apply):
   - Employed, working 1-20 hours per week
   - Employed, working 21-39 hours per week
   - Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
   - Not employed
   - Retired
   - Student
   - Other (i.e. volunteer)

22. How many family members live in your household?
   - Adults (age 18 and older) _____
   - Children (under age 18) _____
   - Total _______
23. Please share your thoughts about how social media may (or may not) impact your family life. Feel free to write as little or as much as you want.