

A Sociological Study of Impact of Social Media on Family Relationships Among Urban Youth

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of social media usage on family relationships among urban youth in Raipur, a Tier-2 city in India. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study combines quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative thematic analysis to examine how digital platforms influence communication patterns, emotional bonding, and intergenerational dynamics within families. Findings reveal that while social media facilitates convenient and continuous contact, it also contributes to reduced face-to-face interaction, emotional distancing, and occasional familial conflict. Youth often experience a disconnect between online engagement and meaningful offline relationships, with generational differences in digital literacy further widening the communication gap. The study highlights a shift in the role of family as the primary agent of socialization, now sharing space with powerful digital influences. It concludes with suggestions for promoting digital balance and fostering empathetic, inclusive family interactions in an increasingly connected world.

Keywords: Social Media, Family Relationships, Urban Youth, Digital Socialization

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, social media has emerged as a dominant force in shaping communication, identity, and social relationships, particularly among urban youth. Platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter are no longer limited to entertainment or casual communication; they have become central to how individuals express themselves, form opinions, maintain social networks, and construct their identities. For young people living in urban settings, these platforms serve as key spaces for self-representation, peer interaction, and access to information.

However, the increasing dependence on social media has also transformed interpersonal relationships within the family. Historically, families in India functioned as primary units of emotional support and socialization, engaging in shared activities such as communal meals, storytelling, and face-to-face conversations that reinforced familial bonds. With the rise of digital communication, these traditional practices are undergoing a shift. Many urban youth are now more engaged with their digital devices than with their immediate family members, even within the confines of the home. This behavioral shift raises critical questions about the quality of familial relationships in the age of smartphones and social networking sites.

While social media provides new opportunities for maintaining family connections—such as through



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family WhatsApp groups or staying in touch with distant relatives—it can also create emotional distance between parents and children, and between siblings. Differences in digital literacy and values between generations may lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, or a lack of meaningful interaction. The family, traditionally the primary agent of socialization, is now competing with powerful digital influences that shape youth perspectives, behaviors, and emotional expressions.

This research seeks to explore how social media is impacting family relationships among urban youth in Raipur, a Tier-2 Indian city. Specifically, it aims to examine whether social media serves as a tool for enhancing family cohesion or contributes to fragmentation and emotional disconnection. The study investigates changing communication patterns, evolving intergenerational dynamics, and the extent to which values and emotional connections are influenced by digital interactions.

Adopting a sociological perspective, the research critically analyzes the lived experiences of young individuals in the digital age—highlighting both the opportunities and challenges posed by social media in family life. By focusing on the urban youth population, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how technological shifts are reshaping the institution of family, and to propose strategies for fostering healthier, more empathetic, and inclusive relationships in digitally connected households.

Review of Literature

The proliferation of social media has fundamentally transformed the nature of interpersonal relationships, with significant implications for the family—a core institution in the process of socialization. Among urban youth, platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are not just tools of social engagement but spaces where identities are performed, affiliations are built, and values are shaped. The intersection of social media and family dynamics has thus emerged as a critical domain of sociological inquiry.

Digital platforms have enabled youth to stay connected across geographical boundaries. Boyd and Ellison (2007) observed that social networking sites allow for persistent and flexible communication. However, scholars like Subrahmanyam and Smahel (2011) argue that this shift in communication has often come at the cost of real-time, face-to-face interactions within families. As youth increasingly spend time online, traditional practices such as shared meals and routine family conversations are being disrupted. The result is a growing physical proximity but emotional distance within households, as young people become more mentally absorbed in digital environments than in familial spaces.

A notable contribution in this area comes from Sherry Turkle (2015), who introduces the concept of "technoference"—technology-driven interference in real-life relationships. She emphasizes that constant digital connection paradoxically leads to emotional disconnection. McDaniel and Coyne (2016) reinforce this argument by documenting how frequent smartphone use during family time can cause children to feel neglected and parents to experience frustration. Over time, these patterns risk weakening emotional bonds and undermining the quality of family relationships.

The generational divide in digital literacy further complicates family dynamics. According to Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), youth often possess greater digital competence than their parents, reversing the traditional flow of knowledge and authority within the household. This shift often leads to tension over issues such as screen time, privacy, and acceptable online behavior. Parents may struggle to supervise or understand their children's digital lives, while youth may view parental concerns as intrusive, thereby challenging established power structures and creating intergenerational conflict.

In traditional contexts, families played a primary role in the transmission of values and cultural norms. However, Rideout and Robb (2018) note that in the current digital landscape, youth are increasingly



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influenced by online peers, influencers, and virtual communities. These digital sources introduce diverse ideologies, lifestyles, and belief systems that may contradict or compete with familial teachings. From a sociological perspective, this indicates a decentralization of the socialization process, where the family's monopoly over value transmission is increasingly contested by external, often global, digital influences.

Despite the concerns, literature also recognizes the constructive role social media can play in fostering family cohesion. Hampton et al. (2011) highlight how digital platforms facilitate emotional closeness among family members separated by distance. Group chats, digital photo-sharing, and collaborative online activities can serve as contemporary tools of bonding, especially within nuclear or geographically dispersed families. In some cases, shared digital experiences can supplement offline interactions and provide new avenues for connection.

While the existing scholarship offers a comprehensive overview of the relationship between social media and family dynamics, several gaps persist. Much of the existing research has focused on Western societies or Indian metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. There is a noticeable lack of studies exploring how social media affects families in Tier-2 cities such as Raipur, where traditional family values continue to coexist with rapid digital adoption. These cities represent hybrid social contexts, where modern technology interacts with deep-rooted cultural norms in unique ways.

Furthermore, studies often generalize social media usage without disaggregating how different platforms may affect different types of family relationships—such as parent-child dynamics versus sibling interactions. There is also limited focus on capturing the lived experiences of youth in semi-urban areas, especially in how they negotiate familial expectations and digital lifestyles.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to investigate the impact of social media usage on family relationships among urban youth in Raipur, a Tier-2 city in central India. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by capturing statistical trends and contextual, narrative insights. Such a design is particularly suited for analysing contemporary social behaviours in digital environments, where numbers alone may not fully reflect the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics. Framed within an exploratory research paradigm, the study responds to the paucity of existing literature on this subject in semi-urban Indian settings. Exploratory studies are instrumental in identifying emerging trends and understanding new or understudied areas-in this case, the intersection of digital media engagement and familial interaction patterns within a socio-cultural context marked by both tradition and transformation. Raipur, as the capital of Chhattisgarh, provides an appropriate backdrop for the study due to its unique socio-demographic character—combining traditional joint family setups and rising digital connectivity. The study specifically focuses on youth aged 15 to 25, a demographic that is both technologically active and in a transitional life phase, navigating shifting roles within family structures. This age group, often caught between the expectations of elder family members and their own digital lifestyles, offers critical insights into the negotiation of family values in the age of social media. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which enabled the inclusion of information-rich individuals who met pre-defined criteria regular social media use, residence in Raipur, and belonging to the targeted age cohort. The final sample comprised 30 respondents, ensuring variation across gender, educational attainment, and family types (nuclear, joint, and extended), thereby enhancing the depth of the analysis while acknowledging the study's limited scope for statistical generalization. Data collection was carried out through an online



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structured questionnaire designed using Google Forms to ensure wide accessibility. The questionnaire featured two sections: a quantitative section with closed-ended items, and a qualitative section with openended prompts. The quantitative portion included multiple-choice questions to capture data on frequency and duration of social media use, preferred platforms, perceived changes in communication within the family, emotional closeness with family members, and household attitudes toward screen time and digital etiquette. The qualitative aspect was developed to elicit detailed, reflective responses regarding personal experiences with social media and its influence on family bonding, intergenerational communication gaps, digital conflicts, and shifts in emotional expression within families. For analysis, the quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distributions and percentages to identify broad trends in usage and attitudes. The qualitative data underwent thematic analysis-a technique involving the coding and categorization of narrative responses into major themes. Through this method, recurring concepts such as emotional distance, digital dependency, generational disconnect, and emerging digital forms of bonding were identified and analysed. These themes were interpreted through a sociological lens, situating them within broader discussions of changing family dynamics in technologically mediated contexts. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process. All participants were briefed about the study's objectives and procedures, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, with all responses used exclusively for academic purposes. Moreover, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. This methodological framework thus provides a robust foundation for exploring the nuanced and evolving relationship between social media engagement and family interactions among urban Indian youth.

3. Findings and Discussion

The data was collected from a sample of 30 urban youth residing in Raipur city through structured questionnaires. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, with attention to gender diversity, age range, and family background to ensure a balanced representation. These factors are especially relevant in a sociological study of family relationships, as individual experiences with social media and family interaction can vary based on one's age, gender, and type of household.

By identifying who the respondents are, we can better understand how social media usage impacts different aspects of their family life, communication patterns, and emotional bonds.

A. Demographic details

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents	

Gender	Number of Respondents
Female	18
Male	12
Total	30

Out of the 30 respondents, 18 (60%) were female and 12 (40%) were male. This shows a slightly higher representation of female participants, which may be helpful in understanding how gender influences the perception of social media's impact on family relationships.

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Age Group	Number of Respondents
15–18 years	9
19-22 years	14
23–25 years	7
Total	30

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

The majority of respondents (14 out of 30) were aged between 19 and 22, followed by 9 respondents in the 15–18 range, and 7 respondents aged 23–25. This shows a good mix of adolescent and early adult participants, capturing diverse phases of youth socialization.

Family Type	imber of Respondents			
Nuclear	21			
Joint	9			

Table 3: Family Structure of Respondents

A significant majority (70%) of respondents belonged to nuclear families, while 30% lived in joint families. This reflects the changing family patterns in urban areas like Raipur, where nuclear family structures are becoming more common. The type of family structure is crucial in understanding how communication patterns and emotional bonding differ, especially with the growing influence of digital media.

B. Social Media Usage

This section presents an analysis of the social media usage patterns among urban youth in Raipur, with a specific focus on how these digital habits influence communication within families. As social media continues to shape modern lifestyles, especially among younger generations, it becomes essential to explore its role not only as a social tool but also as a medium that redefines traditional family interactions. The data here is based on responses from 30 individuals aged 15–25 years, collected through structured questionnaires. It also explores their level of engagement in family group chats or online discussions.

Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Respondents were asked to indicate the social media platforms they use most often. The findings are presented below (Table 4):

Platform	No. of Users (out of 30)	Percentage
WhatsApp	30	100%
Instagram	27	90%
YouTube	24	80%
Facebook	6	20%
Snapchat	3	10%
Twitter	2	7%

 Table 4: Most Frequently used social media platforms



All respondents reported using WhatsApp, making it the most widely used platform, followed by Instagram and YouTube. Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter were used by a smaller number of participants. This reflects the dominance of instant messaging and visual content-sharing platforms among youth. WhatsApp serves as a primary tool for daily communication, while Instagram is preferred for social visibility and content sharing. These findings align with Goffman's theory of self-presentation, where users curate their digital identities. The declining use of platforms like Facebook and Twitter among youth indicates changing platform preferences influenced by age and peer trends.

Duration of Daily Social Media Usage

Respondents were asked how much time they spend on social media each day. The responses are as follows (Table 5):

Time Spent Daily	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	4	13%
1–3 hours	11	37%
4–6 hours	10	33%
More than 6 hours	5	17%

Table 5: Duration of social media usage

Half of the respondents reported using social media for more than four hours per day, while 37% spent between one to three hours online.

This indicates a high level of digital engagement, suggesting that social media is a central part of the daily routine for most urban youth. Sherry Turkle's concept of technoference is particularly relevant here—excessive screen time may interfere with in-person conversations and emotional intimacy within the family.

Use of Social Media for Family Communication

Respondents shared whether they use social media to communicate with family members. The data is summarized below (Table 6):

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	21	70%
Sometimes	6	20%
No	3	10%

Table 6: Ise of social media for family communication

A significant 70% of respondents confirmed that they actively use social media to interact with family members, while 20% do so occasionally. From a structural-functionalist perspective, this reflects an adaptive mechanism where families maintain connectivity through modern means. However, symbolic interactionism questions whether these digital exchanges carry the same emotional weight as traditional face-to-face conversations, especially when mediated by short messages or emojis.

Participation in Family Group Chats or Online Family Discussions

Respondents were asked how often they engage in online family discussions or group chats. The results are as follows (Table 7):



Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	11	37%
Weekly	9	30%
Rarely	7	23%
Never	3	10%

Table 7: Participation in family group chats or family discussions

A majority of respondents (67%) engage in family chats either daily or weekly, while a smaller portion (33%) participate rarely or not at all.

Digital family groups, especially on WhatsApp, serve as informal spaces for bonding, updates, and celebrations. These interactions are particularly common in nuclear and dispersed families, where physical interaction is limited. Yet, qualitative responses suggest that such digital bonding often feels superficial or obligatory.

C. Impact on Family Interactions

This section focuses on analysing the impact of social media on the quality and nature of family interactions among urban youth. With digital platforms becoming a dominant mode of communication in contemporary life, it is essential to explore how they are reshaping traditional patterns of bonding, emotional connection, and intergenerational understanding within families.

Perceived Impact of Social Media on Family Communication

Respondents were asked whether social media has improved their communication with family members. The responses are shown below (Table 8):

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes, significantly	4	13%
Yes, to some extent	15	50%
No, it has had no effect	6	20%
No, it has made communication worse	5	17%

 Table 8: Impact of social media on family communication

Half of the respondents (50%) believed that social media has somewhat improved communication with their family members. Only a small fraction (13%) reported a significant improvement. However, 37% felt that social media had no effect or a negative impact on their family communication.

This indicates a mixed perception of social media's role in improving familial ties. While it enables quick and convenient updates, it may not foster deeper emotional connection. Symbolic interactionism can be used here to analyze how meanings of connection and communication are being renegotiated. Quick replies, likes, and emojis often replace genuine conversation, which may be perceived as less meaningful by some family members.

Replacement of Face-to-Face Conversations

Respondents shared how often social media interactions take the place of face-to-face conversations with family members (Table 9).



Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Frequently	8	27%
Occasionally	13	43%
Rarely	6	20%
Never	3	10%

Table 9: Replacement of face-to-face conversations with online communication

The majority of respondents (70%) acknowledged that social media interactions frequently or occasionally replace in-person conversations at home. Only 10% stated that this never happens.

This trend reflects the growing digital displacement of real-world interactions. Respondents reported being physically present but emotionally unavailable due to screen distractions. This aligns with Turkle's concept of "being alone together," where individuals prioritize virtual conversations over immediate human presence. From a structural-functionalist view, such replacement could disrupt the equilibrium of traditional family routines like shared meals or evening discussions.

Conflicts and Misunderstandings Arising from Social Media Use

The respondents were asked if social media had ever led to family conflicts or misunderstandings (table 10).

Table	10: C	Conflicts	and mis	underst	andings	arising	from	social	media u	se

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	19	63%
No	11	37%

A significant 63% of respondents reported that social media has caused conflicts or misunderstandings in their families at some point.

The causes of conflict varied—from excessive screen time and delayed responses to disagreements over content posted online. These conflicts reflect intergenerational digital divides and differing expectations of behavior, privacy, and values. Conflict theory aptly explains this dynamic as a power struggle between digitally fluent youth seeking autonomy and elders enforcing traditional boundaries. Such disagreements may lead to tension, surveillance, or even emotional withdrawal.

Understanding of Social Media Habits by Family Members

Respondents were asked whether they felt understood by their family regarding their social media habits and preferences (Table 11).

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	8	27%
No	9	30%
Somewhat	13	43%

Table 11: Understanding of social media habits by family members

Only 27% of respondents felt that their family members fully understood their social media use. A significant 43% felt somewhat understood, while 30% believed their family members did not understand their digital behavior at all.



This indicates a lack of intergenerational digital empathy, where parents or elders may not grasp the importance or nature of online interaction for youth. As a result, youth often feel judged, misunderstood, or restricted. This emotional gap affects not only communication but also trust and openness within the family. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the meanings attached to digital engagement differ across generations, leading to misinterpretation and distance.

Sociologically, these patterns reflect broader changes in urban family structures and interaction norms. The digital age demands new forms of family adaptation, where communication involves balancing realworld presence with virtual engagement. Strengthening family bonds in this context requires digital literacy, mutual understanding, and shared digital spaces where both youth and elders feel respected and connected.

D. Socialization and Family Bonds

This chapter explores how social media influences the values, emotional connections, and communication dynamics within families. It also reflects on whether family bonds are being strengthened or weakened due to digital interactions, while offering youth perspectives on maintaining a healthy balance between online life and family relationships.

Influence on Values and Opinions

Respondents were asked whether their values and opinions are shaped more by social media or by their families (Table 12).

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Mostly by social media	6	20%
Mostly by family	9	30%
A combination of both	15	50%

Table 12: Influence on values and opinions

Half of the respondents stated that their values are influenced by both family and social media, while 30% rely more on their family's guidance and 20% on digital platforms.

This suggests that for many urban youth, socialization is now a blended process, where both digital media and traditional family teachings contribute to identity formation.

Emotional Connection through Social Media

Respondents shared whether they feel emotionally connected to their families through social media (table 13).

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	33%
No	9	30%
Sometimes	11	37%

 Table 13: Emotional Connection through social media

Only one-third of the respondents felt emotionally connected to their families through social media, while another third did not feel connected at all. The remaining 37% had mixed experiences.



This indicates that while social media facilitates functional communication, it does not always lead to emotional closeness. Emotional connection still largely depends on quality interaction, which may be missing in digital formats. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, meaningful relationships are built through shared symbols, emotions, and body language—elements often missing in online interactions.

Frequency of Discussing Social Media Content with Family

Respondents were asked how often they engage their families in conversations about trending social media content (news, memes, videos, etc.) as given in table 14.

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	5	17%
Weekly	10	33%
Rarely	11	37%
Never	4	13%

Table 14: Frequency of discussing social media content with family

Only 17% of respondents discuss social media content daily with their families, while the majority do so rarely or not at all.

This suggests that intergenerational digital dialogue is limited, either due to lack of common interests or communication barriers. This limited engagement may restrict opportunities for bonding over shared digital experiences. According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, younger members may possess digital knowledge that isn't equally shared with elders, leading to a divide in shared discourse and bonding.

Impact of Social Media on Family Bonds

Respondents gave their opinion on whether social media has strengthened or weakened their family relationships (table 15).

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Strengthened	8	27%
Weakened	13	43%
No noticeable change	9	30%

Table 15: Impact of social media on family bonds

A significant 43% felt that social media has weakened their family bonds, while only 27% believed it has strengthened them. 30% felt no major change.

This reinforces concerns raised in earlier sections. Despite the convenience of digital tools, real emotional bonding often suffers due to over-reliance on virtual communication. The weakening of family bonds can be attributed to reduced physical presence, emotional detachment, and digital misunderstandings. From a conflict theory perspective, this indicates growing tension between individual autonomy (represented by private digital spaces) and collective family values.

4. Conclusion

This paper examined how digital communication platforms have altered traditional patterns of interaction, emotional bonding, and value transmission within families. By combining quantitative and qualitative



methods, this research provided an in-depth understanding of how social media shapes the everyday lives and relationships of young people in a rapidly changing urban context.

The findings indicate that while social media has introduced new opportunities for connection—such as staying in touch with distant relatives and sharing content through family group chats—it has also contributed to emotional distancing, reduced face-to-face conversations, and generational misunderstandings. Many respondents reported that their screen time often replaced in-person interactions, leading to communication gaps and occasional conflicts with parents or siblings. Furthermore, the study highlights the growing influence of digital platforms on values and identity, with many youth reporting that their opinions are shaped by a mix of family teachings and online influences.

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of social media on family relationships among urban youth, it is important to recognize certain limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 30 respondents, all from Raipur city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other urban or rural contexts. Additionally, the focus on youth aged 15–25 years excluded the perspectives of older family members such as parents or grandparents, whose inclusion could offer a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational dynamics. Furthermore, while platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram were prominently featured, the study did not undertake a detailed comparative analysis of different social media platforms and their distinct influences on familial relationships.

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