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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON MODERN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has become an essential part of modern family life, transforming the ways family members communicate, maintain emotional connections, share responsibilities, and develop interpersonal relationships. Smartphones, social media platforms, instant messaging applications, video calls, and digital entertainment provide families with convenient opportunities to remain connected despite geographical distance and busy schedules. However, excessive technology use may also reduce face-to-face interaction, interrupt family conversations, create misunderstandings, and influence relationships between parents and children. Qian and Hu (2024) explain that digitalization has become embedded in everyday family practices, affecting family communication, social support, and relationship management. Similarly, research on digital technology and family interactions highlights the importance of understanding both the benefits and challenges of technological engagement. This article examines the impact of digital technology on modern family relationships, focusing on communication patterns, emotional closeness, parent–child interaction, and family cohesion. It adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach to explore existing academic research and identify practices that may help families maintain healthy relationships in a digitally connected society. The discussion emphasizes that technology itself does not necessarily strengthen or weaken family relationships; its influence depends on the purposes, frequency, and manner of its use. Balanced digital habits, effective communication, and shared family rules can help families benefit from technological developments while protecting meaningful personal interaction.

KEYWORDS

Digital Technology, Family Relationships, Family Communication, Social Media, Parent–Child Interaction, Emotional Closeness, Digitalization

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has significantly transformed modern family relationships by changing how individuals communicate, exchange information, express emotions, and maintain connections in everyday life. Smartphones, social networking platforms, messaging applications, and video communication tools have become common features of household routines, allowing family members to remain connected even when they live in different cities or countries. These technologies provide convenient ways to share experiences, coordinate responsibilities, celebrate important occasions, and offer emotional support. Qian and Hu (2024) present a multilevel conceptual framework demonstrating that digitalization influences family practices at individual, community, and broader societal levels. Their work suggests that technology should be understood as an increasingly integrated part of family life rather than as an isolated communication tool. Nevertheless, the growing presence of digital devices raises important

questions about whether technological convenience consistently contributes to stronger emotional relationships or sometimes replaces valuable face-to-face interaction.One of the most important effects of digital technology is its influence on communication between parents, children, spouses, and other family members. Digital communication allows individuals to exchange messages quickly, discuss everyday concerns, and maintain contact throughout the day. Parents can use messaging applications to monitor children's schedules, provide guidance, and remain involved in their activities, while relatives living abroad can participate in family events through video calls. Erstad et al. (2024), in their review of digital technologies across generations, identify increased connectedness, intimacy, belonging, and care as important dimensions of digitally mediated family relationships. These developments demonstrate that technology can support family cohesion when it facilitates meaningful communication and mutual assistance. However, the quality of communication remains important because frequent messages or online contact do not necessarily guarantee emotional understanding, attentive listening, or the resolution of interpersonal conflicts.The increasing use of smartphones and social media within households has also created concerns regarding interruptions during family interaction. Family members may remain physically present in the same room while directing their attention toward separate digital activities, reducing opportunities for conversation and shared experiences. Gahler (2025) examines parental technoference, referring to situations in which technology interrupts parent–child interactions, and reports that perceived interference is associated with more negative assessments of the parent–child relationship by co-parents. This issue is particularly important during meals, family gatherings, conversations, and children's requests for attention, when uninterrupted engagement can support emotional security and trust. When digital notifications, online entertainment, or work-related communication repeatedly interrupt these moments, family members may feel overlooked or disconnected. Therefore, understanding digital technology's influence requires attention not only to the amount of time spent using devices but also to the ways technology enters important interpersonal situations.

At the same time, children and adolescents may develop digital interests and communication habits that differ from those of older family members, creating disagreements about screen time, online safety, privacy, and household responsibilities. Research by Janssens et al. (2025) examines parents' and children's perspectives on mobile devices in family interactions, highlighting the importance of considering both generations when studying technology-related family experiences. These differences indicate that effective digital parenting requires more than imposing restrictions; it also involves listening to children's concerns, explaining appropriate boundaries, and developing shared expectations. A supportive approach can help parents guide children's digital participation without unnecessarily weakening trust or independence.Furthermore, the influence of digital technology extends beyond parent–child communication to marital relationships, sibling interactions, and connections between younger and older generations. Couples may use digital platforms to coordinate responsibilities and remain emotionally connected during busy working schedules, while siblings can share interests,

entertainment, and personal experiences through online communication. Grandparents and other older relatives may also benefit from video calls and messaging applications that help them participate in family life despite geographical separation. Erstad et al. (2024) emphasize that digital platforms can transform relationships across generations by creating opportunities for connection while also introducing conflicts over expectations, control, and technology use. These findings suggest that digital technology affects different family relationships in different ways, depending on individual needs, household circumstances, and communication practices. Consequently, its impact should not be evaluated through a single assumption that technological engagement is either entirely beneficial or inherently harmful.

In contemporary society, maintaining healthy family relationships increasingly requires a balanced approach to digital participation. Technology can improve accessibility, facilitate mutual support, and strengthen connections between geographically separated relatives, but excessive or poorly managed use can interfere with attentive communication and shared family activities. Al-Momani and Rababa (2025) discuss the implications of modern technology for family communication and interaction, emphasizing the need to understand its influence within everyday family life. Similarly, Qian and Hu (2024) demonstrate the importance of examining digitalization within wider social and family contexts. Despite growing scholarly attention, further consideration is needed regarding how families establish boundaries, manage differences between generations, and preserve emotional closeness while using digital devices. The present study therefore examines the impact of digital technology on modern family relationships, with particular attention to communication quality, emotional connection, parent–child interaction, and strategies for promoting healthier digital habits within households.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of digital technology on communication patterns and emotional relationships among modern family members.
2. To identify the major benefits and challenges of digital technology for parent–child interaction and family cohesion.
3. To explore practical strategies for balancing digital technology use with meaningful face-to-face family interaction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does digital technology influence communication patterns and emotional relationships among modern family members?
2. What are the major benefits and challenges of digital technology for parent–child interaction and family cohesion?

3. What strategies can families adopt to balance digital technology use with meaningful face-to-face interaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The digitalization of family life has become an important subject in contemporary family and communication research. Qian and Hu (2024) developed a multilevel conceptual framework to explain how digital technologies influence family practices, relationships, communication, and social support. Their framework examines digitalization at individual, community, and societal levels, demonstrating that family relationships are shaped by both personal technology-use habits and wider social conditions. According to this perspective, digital platforms can help family members maintain contact, coordinate responsibilities, and develop supportive relationships, but their influence also depends on how families integrate technology into everyday routines. This research provides a useful theoretical foundation for understanding modern family relationships because it recognizes that technology does not operate independently of family values, cultural expectations, and interpersonal needs.

Erstad et al. (2024) examined the relationship between digital platforms, family life, and intergenerational connections through a scoping review of existing research. Their review identified two important themes: increased connectedness through intimacy, belonging, and care, and the emergence of power struggles and conflicts associated with digital engagement. Their analysis suggests that digital technologies can transform family relationships by creating new opportunities for communication while also changing expectations concerning availability, privacy, and participation. Digital platforms can be particularly valuable for families whose members live far apart, as they make regular communication and shared experiences more accessible. Nevertheless, the authors emphasize the need to consider relationships across multiple generations rather than focusing exclusively on parents and children. This perspective supports a broader understanding of how digital technology influences spouses, siblings, grandparents, and extended family networks.

Research on parental technology use has drawn attention to the problem of technological interference in family interaction. Gahler (2025) investigated parental technoference and its implications for parent–child relationships, focusing on families with preschool- and kindergarten-aged children in the United States. The study found that when one co-parent perceived the other as allowing technology to interfere with time spent with children, the co-parent tended to evaluate that parent–child relationship more negatively. This finding highlights the importance of parental attention, particularly during everyday activities in which children seek emotional support and engagement. Frequent device interruptions may make meaningful interaction more difficult, even when parents and children are physically together. The study also indicates that perceptions of technology use within families matter, suggesting that clear

expectations and mutually agreed boundaries may help reduce conflict and protect opportunities for parent–child communication.Janssens et al. (2025) explored parents' and children's perspectives on mobile devices in family interactions, including technology-related interruptions, parent–child relationship quality, and well-being. Examining the perspectives of both generations is therefore important for developing balanced approaches to digital parenting. Rather than treating children's digital participation only as a problem, families can benefit from open discussions about online activities, responsible use, and the importance of maintaining time for personal interaction. This approach recognizes that relationship quality depends on mutual understanding and the manner in which technology is incorporated into family routines.

Al-Momani and Rababa (2025) examined modern technology and its influence on family communication through a theoretical study based on existing literature. Their work provides a basis for considering how technological developments affect communication patterns and interaction within households. Digital tools can improve the speed and convenience of communication, support the exchange of information, and allow relatives to maintain contact despite geographical distance. At the same time, the availability of digital entertainment and continuous online communication may compete with family conversations and shared activities. These contrasting possibilities suggest that the consequences of technology depend on how family members use it rather than simply on whether they possess digital devices. The literature therefore supports the importance of examining communication quality, everyday routines, and family expectations when evaluating the relationship between technology use and family cohesion.Briggs et al. (2025) investigated human and digital ecosystems within modern households by examining how household members use digital devices, distribute technological responsibilities, and establish boundaries around shared technology use. Their study highlights the importance of understanding digital devices as part of a wider household environment in which people have different needs, roles, and expectations. Technology can support household coordination and everyday convenience, but its integration also raises questions about privacy, shared access, and appropriate limits. Family rules concerning device use are particularly relevant when several generations live together or when household members differ in their digital skills. This research indicates that technology management should take account of family circumstances and the practical purposes for which devices are used. It also supports the view that clear boundaries can help families integrate digital tools without allowing them to dominate shared family life.

Recent research by Nobakht et al. (2026) examined social media use and family relationship quality through a six-wave longitudinal study following young people from ages 10 to 20. Their study addresses an important limitation in earlier research by distinguishing changes within individuals and families over time from stable differences between families. This approach is valuable because an association between social media use and relationship quality does not automatically establish that social media causes relationships to improve or deteriorate.

Considered alongside the studies by Qian and Hu (2024), Erstad et al. (2024), and Gahler (2025), the literature demonstrates that digital technology and family relationships are connected through several processes, including communication, emotional support, parental attention, and household expectations. However, further research across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts is needed to clarify how these factors interact. The present study builds on this literature by examining both the supportive possibilities and the potential relational challenges of digital technology in modern family life.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine the impact of digital technology on modern family relationships. It draws on published scholarly research concerning family communication, digitalization, social media use, parent–child interaction, and intergenerational relationships. Relevant academic publications from 2024 to 2026 are used to identify recurring themes and develop an understanding of how digital technologies influence everyday family experiences. The selected literature includes conceptual frameworks, literature reviews, theoretical discussions, and empirical studies that address different dimensions of technology use within households. Particular attention is given to research examining emotional closeness, technological interruptions, communication practices, and the establishment of family boundaries. This approach allows the study to synthesize existing evidence without claiming to collect new participant data.

The literature was examined thematically to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns across the selected studies. The analysis focused on three principal areas: the positive contributions of digital technology to family communication, the challenges associated with excessive or disruptive technology use, and the strategies that may help families maintain healthy relationships. Findings from individual studies were compared to identify where the evidence supported similar interpretations and where differences in research methods or contexts required caution. This process also helped distinguish conceptual arguments from findings based on empirical data. As the study relies on existing publications, its conclusions are based on the available literature rather than on original interviews, surveys, or observations of families.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a descriptive and analytical research design to investigate how digital technology shapes modern family relationships. The descriptive component outlines the ways smartphones, social media, messaging applications, and video communication tools are incorporated into family life. The analytical component examines how these technologies may influence communication quality, emotional connection, parent–child relationships, and family cohesion. The design organizes the existing literature around the study's research objectives and questions,

enabling a structured assessment of both positive and negative effects. It also recognizes that the impact of technology may vary according to family structure, age, cultural context, digital literacy, and patterns of use.The research design is based on secondary data obtained from scholarly publications relevant to the research topic. Academic findings are compared and interpreted to develop an integrated understanding of digital technology's role in family relationships. The design does not involve primary data collection, experimental testing, or statistical measurement of a new sample. Consequently, it is appropriate for identifying established themes, theoretical explanations, and areas requiring further investigation, but it cannot establish causal relationships independently. This approach provides a foundation for future empirical studies that could examine family experiences through interviews, questionnaires, or longitudinal observations in specific social and cultural settings.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study uses qualitative thematic analysis to organize and interpret the findings of the selected literature. The first analytical theme concerns digital connectivity and communication, including how messaging applications, video calls, and social media help family members maintain contact, exchange information, and provide emotional support. Research by Qian and Hu (2024) and Erstad et al. (2024) informs this theme by explaining how digitalization has become integrated into everyday family practices and intergenerational relationships. The second theme concerns technological interference, including device-related interruptions, reduced attention during family activities, and disagreements over digital habits. Gahler (2025) and Janssens et al. (2025) provide relevant perspectives on these issues, particularly in relation to parent–child interactions and differences in how parents and children perceive mobile device use.

The third theme focuses on family boundaries and the management of digital technology within households. The selected literature was compared to identify approaches that may help families balance the convenience of digital communication with the importance of direct interpersonal engagement. These approaches include shared rules for device use, technology-free periods during family activities, open discussion of online behaviour, and age-appropriate digital guidance. The analysis also considered methodological limitations, particularly the difference between associations and causal effects and the limited generalizability of findings from particular populations. The resulting interpretation presents digital technology as a factor whose influence on family relationships depends on patterns of use, family expectations, and the quality of interpersonal communication.

FINDINGS

The findings of the literature-based analysis indicate that digital technology has both beneficial and challenging implications for modern family relationships. Digital communication tools make

it easier for family members to remain connected, exchange information, coordinate responsibilities, and provide emotional support across geographical distances. The studies reviewed by Qian and Hu (2024) and Erstad et al. (2024) suggest that digitalization has become an important part of contemporary family practices, creating additional opportunities for communication, care, and intergenerational connection. These benefits are particularly relevant for families whose members have demanding work schedules or live in different locations. However, digital communication should complement rather than automatically replace meaningful face-to-face interaction. The quality of family relationships continues to depend on attentive communication, mutual understanding, and emotional involvement.

The analysis also identifies technology-related interruptions and disagreements over device use as important challenges for family cohesion. Gahler (2025) highlights the relationship between perceived parental technoference and negative assessments of parent–child relationship quality, while Janssens et al. (2025) demonstrate the relevance of considering both parental and children's perspectives on mobile devices. Its effects depend on the circumstances, purposes, and patterns of digital engagement.A further finding is that balanced technology use and clear family communication can help address these challenges. Establishing mutually agreed rules, protecting time for family conversations, encouraging responsible online behaviour, and discussing digital concerns openly may support healthier relationships. The reviewed literature also reveals a need for additional research involving diverse family structures, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic circumstances. Existing studies provide valuable explanations of digital family life, but their findings should not be generalized to every household without considering differences in context. Overall, the findings suggest that digital technology can support family cohesion when used purposefully, while excessive or disruptive use may undermine opportunities for emotional connection and direct interaction.

CONCLUSION

Digital technology has become an influential feature of modern family relationships, transforming communication practices, emotional connections, parenting, and interactions across generations. The literature examined in this study indicates that digital tools can strengthen family connections by facilitating communication, supporting relatives who live apart, and helping family members coordinate everyday responsibilities. At the same time, excessive device use, technological interruptions, and disagreements about digital boundaries may reduce opportunities for attentive conversation and meaningful shared experiences. Research by Qian and Hu (2024), Erstad et al. (2024), and Gahler (2025) illustrates the importance of understanding digital technology in relation to the social and emotional processes that sustain family relationships. Therefore, its influence should be evaluated in terms of how it is used and how it interacts with existing family practices rather than being regarded as entirely beneficial or harmful.

The study concludes that maintaining healthy family relationships in a digitally connected society requires a balanced and thoughtful approach to technology use. Families can benefit from establishing reasonable device-use boundaries, encouraging open communication, protecting time for shared activities, and developing digital habits that respect the needs of different generations. Parents should provide appropriate guidance while also listening to children's experiences and concerns, and all family members should recognize the importance of attention and mutual respect during interpersonal interaction. Although the literature provides useful insights, further empirical research is needed to examine these relationships across diverse cultural and social settings. Ultimately, digital technology is most likely to contribute positively to family life when it supports rather than replaces emotional understanding, trust, cooperation, and meaningful human connection.

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