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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND CHANGES IN FAMILY INTERACTION PATTERNS

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication has become an integral part of contemporary family life, transforming how family members interact, exchange information, express emotions, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Smartphones, instant messaging applications, video calls, and social networking platforms allow parents, children, spouses, and extended relatives to communicate conveniently across geographical distances and demanding schedules. However, these technologies have also introduced changes in face-to-face communication, family routines, emotional availability, and expectations concerning personal privacy. Janssen et al. (2025) examined parent–adolescent online communication through a 100-day diary study, demonstrating that digital communication is an established part of everyday family interaction and frequently serves practical coordination purposes. Similarly, Hwang et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of digital communication in understanding intergenerational relationships and family well-being. This article examines the changes in family interaction patterns associated with digital communication, focusing on communication frequency, emotional closeness, parent–child relationships, and intergenerational support. It adopts a qualitative, literature-based approach to synthesize existing research and identify both the benefits and challenges of digital interaction. The discussion suggests that digital communication can strengthen family connections when it supports meaningful interaction, but its effects depend on the purpose, context, and quality of communication. A balanced combination of digital contact and direct interpersonal engagement can help families maintain healthy relationships in an increasingly connected society.

KEYWORDS

Digital Communication, Family Interaction Patterns, Family Relationships, Parent–Child Communication, Intergenerational Relationships, Emotional Closeness, Digital Technology

INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has significantly transformed the ways families interact, maintain relationships, and organize their everyday lives. Smartphones, messaging applications, social networking platforms, and video calls have created new opportunities for family members to communicate quickly and conveniently, regardless of their physical location. Parents can coordinate children's activities, spouses can remain connected during working hours, and relatives living in different cities or countries can participate in family conversations and important occasions. These developments have made digital communication an important part of contemporary family interaction. Hwang et al. (2024) examined digital communication between parents and adult children in South Korea, demonstrating that patterns of digital contact can help explain differences in intergenerational solidarity and well-being. Their research highlights the importance of understanding digital communication not merely as a technological activity but as part of the wider emotional and social relationships that connect family members.One major

change associated with digital communication is the increasing flexibility of family interaction. Traditional family communication often depended on physical presence, shared household routines, and scheduled telephone conversations. Digital platforms now allow family members to exchange messages, share photographs, make video calls, and communicate throughout the day. These practices can improve coordination, reduce feelings of distance, and make emotional support more accessible. Janssen et al. (2025), in a preregistered 100-day diary study involving 479 adolescents, found that online communication between parents and adolescents occurred on 43% of observed days and averaged approximately 20 minutes per day. Their findings also showed that much of this communication concerned practical coordination. This evidence suggests that digital communication has become a routine feature of family life, although the frequency and purpose of interaction differ across individuals and households.

Digital communication has also influenced the quality and nature of parent–child relationships. Parents can use messaging applications to provide guidance, check on children's activities, and offer support when they are away from home. Adolescents can communicate their needs, ask questions, and maintain contact while developing greater independence. At the same time, digital communication can create concerns about privacy, monitoring, responsiveness, and parental control. Jensen et al. (2023) investigated digital interaction styles between parents and college students by analyzing nearly 30,000 text messages exchanged by 238 students and their mothers and fathers. Their study identified different patterns of digital interaction, highlighting how communication practices can reflect the dynamics of existing parent–child relationships. These findings suggest that digital communication may support relationships when it is responsive and mutually understood, while its interpretation depends on family expectations and individual needs.Another important development concerns the relationship between digital communication and emotional closeness among family members. Messaging and video calls can provide reassurance, companionship, and opportunities to discuss personal experiences, particularly when relatives live apart. Hwang et al. (2024) identified different patterns of intergenerational solidarity, including relationships characterized by strong connections and those that remained emotionally distant despite digital contact. Their findings indicate that digital communication should be considered alongside the broader quality of family relationships rather than treated as a substitute for emotional closeness. Similarly, research on long-distance intergenerational communication has shown that digital tools can contribute to perceived social support and family communication satisfaction when they facilitate meaningful emotional and informational exchanges (Technology in Society, 2025). These findings emphasize that the value of digital interaction depends not only on how frequently family members communicate but also on the support and understanding conveyed through those interactions.

Despite its advantages, digital communication may also create interruptions in face-to-face family interaction. Family members may use smartphones during meals, conversations, and shared activities, potentially reducing their attention to people around them. Notifications, online entertainment, and work-related messages can compete with opportunities for direct conversation

and emotional engagement. Al-Momani and Rababa (2025) examined modern technology and family communication through a theoretical review, discussing how technological developments affect interaction within households. Their work provides a basis for considering the importance of purposeful technology use and the protection of meaningful family communication. Nevertheless, the effects of digital engagement should not be generalized to every family. Nobakht et al. (2026), using six waves of longitudinal data, found no evidence that ordinary variation in parents' or adolescents' social media use predicted poorer family relationship quality. This finding highlights the need to distinguish between digital communication that supports relationships and specific patterns of use that may interfere with family interaction.In contemporary society, understanding changes in family interaction patterns is essential because digital communication increasingly operates alongside traditional forms of interpersonal contact. It influences how family members coordinate responsibilities, express care, negotiate independence, and maintain connections across generations. However, the relationship between digital technology and family well-being remains complex, shaped by communication purposes, family circumstances, and the quality of existing relationships. Mennes et al. (2026), in a scoping review of digital disconnection within family contexts, examined strategies for managing technology use and highlighted the need for a more relationship-focused understanding of digital participation. Building on this literature, the present study examines how digital communication changes family interaction patterns, with particular attention to communication frequency, emotional closeness, parent–child relationships, and intergenerational support. It also considers how families can benefit from digital connectivity while preserving meaningful face-to-face interaction.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine how digital communication changes interaction patterns and communication practices among family members.
2. To identify the benefits and challenges of digital communication for emotional closeness, parent–child relationships, and intergenerational support.
3. To explore approaches for balancing digital communication with meaningful face-to-face family interaction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does digital communication change interaction patterns and communication practices among family members?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of digital communication for emotional closeness, parent–child relationships, and intergenerational support?
3. How can families balance digital communication with meaningful face-to-face interaction?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital communication has become a central subject in contemporary family research because it changes how family members coordinate daily activities, exchange information, and maintain emotional connections. Hwang et al. (2024) examined intergenerational solidarity and digital communication among parents and adult children in South Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study identified different relationship patterns, including closely connected families, digitally connected but geographically distant relatives, conflictual relationships, and more independent family relationships. The findings indicated that digital communication was particularly meaningful when considered alongside emotional closeness and other dimensions of family solidarity. This research demonstrates that communication through text messages, video calls, and social media can help maintain family relationships, although digital contact alone does not guarantee a strong emotional bond. The study provides an important foundation for understanding how modern families combine digital interaction with established relationship practices. Janssen et al. (2025) investigated parent–adolescent communication through a preregistered 100-day diary study involving 479 adolescents. The researchers found that online communication between parents and adolescents occurred on approximately 43% of observed days, averaging around 20 minutes per day. Much of this communication concerned practical coordination, such as activities, whereabouts, and everyday arrangements. The study also identified differences in communication patterns among adolescents, demonstrating that digital interaction varies in frequency and duration across individuals. These findings suggest that family communication has become more flexible, allowing parents and children to maintain contact outside the home and coordinate responsibilities efficiently. However, the study primarily described communication patterns rather than establishing whether digital communication improves or weakens relationship quality. This distinction is important because frequent online contact and meaningful emotional communication are related but different aspects of family interaction.

Jensen et al. (2023) examined digital interaction styles between parents and college students by analyzing nearly 30,000 text messages exchanged by 238 students and their mothers and fathers. Their research identified different patterns of interaction based on responsiveness and monitoring, demonstrating that digital communication can reflect existing family relationships and expectations. Messaging can help parents remain involved in their children's lives while allowing young adults to maintain contact as they develop greater independence. At the same time, the meaning of digital contact may differ between parents and children, particularly when supportive communication is interpreted as excessive monitoring. The findings highlight the importance of considering the nature and purpose of digital exchanges rather than treating message frequency as the only indicator of family connection. This research contributes to

understanding how digital communication influences autonomy, responsiveness, and parent–child interaction during the transition to adulthood.

Research on intergenerational relationships further demonstrates the importance of digital communication for family members who live apart. Hwang et al. (2024) examined digital solidarity and psychological well-being among older parents during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on communication with adult children. Their findings indicated that older parents in a digitally connected relationship group reported better psychological well-being than those in a mixed digital-connection group. The study suggests that digital contact can help maintain relationships and provide emotional reassurance when face-to-face interaction is limited. However, the findings should be interpreted within the study's specific pandemic context rather than assumed to apply equally to every family. They nevertheless demonstrate that digital communication can become an important source of continuity, particularly for older relatives who depend on regular contact with adult children. This perspective broadens the study of family interaction beyond parents and adolescents to include relationships across the life course. Zhan and You (2024) investigated the relationship between family communication patterns, self-efficacy, and adolescents' online prosocial behaviour. Their research examined how communication within the family relates to adolescents' behaviour in digital environments, highlighting the importance of family interaction in shaping online participation. Constructive communication can help adolescents develop confidence, understand social expectations, and engage more responsibly with others online. This perspective suggests that family interaction patterns extend beyond communication within the household because family experiences may also influence how younger members behave in digital communities. Families that encourage discussion, explanation, and mutual understanding may be better positioned to guide responsible online behaviour than families that rely solely on restrictions. The study therefore provides a useful connection between everyday family communication and adolescents' social participation in digital settings. Mennes et al. (2026) examined digital disconnection within family contexts through a scoping review of 68 peer-reviewed studies. Their review identified several approaches to managing technology use, including boundaries based on time, content, activities, and context. The authors also highlighted that existing research often focuses on parent–child relationships while giving comparatively less attention to couples, siblings, and wider family systems. These findings are relevant to family interaction because the decision to disconnect from devices may affect both individual experiences and shared household relationships. For example, limiting smartphone use during meals or conversations may create opportunities for direct interaction, while overly strict restrictions may generate disagreement if family members do not share the same expectations. The literature therefore supports a context-sensitive approach in which families establish reasonable digital boundaries while considering their different needs and responsibilities.

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. Unlike research that relies

only on observations at a single point in time, the study investigated whether changes in social media use predicted changes in family relationships. The researchers found no evidence that ordinary variation in adolescents' or parents' social media use predicted poorer family relationship quality, family functioning, or attachment. This finding challenges the assumption that greater social media use necessarily weakens family relationships and emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between general use and specific disruptive behaviours. Considered alongside Janssen et al. (2025), Hwang et al. (2024), and Mennes et al. (2026), the evidence suggests that digital communication can support family coordination and connection, but its consequences depend on the relational context and patterns of engagement. Further research across diverse cultures and family structures is needed to clarify how digital communication influences family interaction over time.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine changes in family interaction patterns associated with digital communication. It draws on scholarly publications addressing parent–child communication, intergenerational relationships, digital interaction styles, online prosocial behaviour, and technology use within family settings. The selected literature includes empirical studies, longitudinal research, conceptual discussions, and scoping reviews published between 2023 and 2026. These sources provide different perspectives on how digital communication affects everyday coordination, emotional support, family closeness, and face-to-face interaction. The study relies on secondary data from published research and does not claim to collect new information directly from families.The selected publications were examined thematically to identify recurring patterns, similarities, differences, and gaps in existing knowledge. Particular attention was given to the benefits of digital communication, including accessibility, practical coordination, and support across geographical distances, as well as challenges involving privacy, interruptions, and differences in communication expectations. The findings of individual studies were interpreted in relation to their research designs and populations to avoid treating results from one context as universally applicable. This approach provides a structured understanding of the topic while recognizing that family relationships are influenced by cultural, social, and individual circumstances.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component explains the ways digital communication is incorporated into family life through messaging applications, video calls, social media, and other digital platforms. The analytical component examines how these communication practices relate to family interaction, emotional closeness, parent–child relationships, and intergenerational support. The research is organized around the stated objectives and questions, allowing the existing literature to be evaluated systematically in relation to the study's central concerns.The research design is based entirely on secondary

sources and involves no original surveys, interviews, experiments, or direct observations. Findings from different studies are compared to develop an integrated interpretation of changes in family communication patterns. Because the research is literature-based, it can identify established themes and research gaps but cannot independently establish causal relationships. Its conclusions are therefore presented as a synthesis of available scholarly evidence rather than as results from a newly conducted empirical investigation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study uses qualitative thematic analysis to examine recurring patterns in the selected literature. The first theme concerns changes in family communication practices, including the convenience of messaging applications, the frequency of online contact, and the coordination of daily activities. Janssen et al. (2025) and Jensen et al. (2023) provide relevant evidence regarding digital interaction between parents and their children, particularly the ways messaging supports everyday communication and reflects existing relationship dynamics. The second theme focuses on emotional closeness and intergenerational support. Hwang et al. (2024) demonstrate the importance of considering digital communication alongside emotional connection, geographical distance, and wider family relationships. These studies were compared to understand how digital communication can support family interaction without assuming that increased contact automatically improves relationship quality.The third theme examines the challenges of digital communication, including interruptions during face-to-face interaction, concerns about privacy, and differences in expectations between generations. Mennes et al. (2026) provide a framework for understanding how families establish boundaries around technology use, while Nobakht et al. (2026) offer evidence that ordinary variation in social media use does not necessarily predict poorer family relationship quality. The analysis considered these findings together to identify the importance of communication purposes, family circumstances, and responsible digital habits. As the study relies on published literature, no new statistical calculations or original empirical measurements were conducted.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that digital communication has made family interaction more flexible, accessible, and convenient. Messaging applications, video calls, and social networking platforms allow family members to coordinate responsibilities, share information, and maintain contact when they are physically separated. Janssen et al. (2025) found that parent–adolescent online communication frequently serves practical coordination purposes, while Hwang et al. (2024) demonstrated the relevance of digital contact to intergenerational solidarity and well-being. These findings suggest that digital communication can strengthen family connectivity, particularly when relatives have demanding schedules or live in different locations. However, meaningful family interaction depends on the quality and purpose of communication rather than on the frequency of digital contact alone.The analysis also indicates that digital communication

can create challenges when it interferes with direct interaction or produces disagreements about privacy, monitoring, and personal independence. Parents may use digital devices to remain involved in their children's activities, while adolescents may interpret frequent messages or monitoring as intrusive. Similarly, excessive device engagement during shared activities may reduce opportunities for attentive listening and meaningful conversation. Nevertheless, Nobakht et al. (2026) found no evidence that ordinary variation in social media use predicted poorer family relationship quality over time. This finding suggests that concerns should focus on specific patterns of disruptive technology use rather than treating digital communication itself as a cause of weakened family relationships.A further finding is that balanced digital habits and open communication can help families manage changes in interaction patterns. Establishing mutually understood expectations, respecting privacy, using digital platforms for emotional support, and protecting time for shared activities may help families combine the advantages of digital connectivity with meaningful face-to-face interaction. The literature also highlights a need for further research involving diverse cultural settings, family structures, and age groups. Overall, the findings suggest that digital communication can support healthy family relationships when it complements direct interaction and responds to the needs of different family members.

CONCLUSION

Digital communication has transformed contemporary family interaction patterns by changing how family members exchange information, coordinate everyday activities, maintain emotional connections, and support relatives across geographical distances. The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that digital technologies can make communication more accessible and help families maintain relationships despite busy schedules and physical separation. At the same time, challenges may arise when digital engagement interferes with face-to-face communication or creates disagreements about privacy, monitoring, and personal independence. Research by Janssen et al. (2025), Jensen et al. (2023), and Hwang et al. (2024) highlights the importance of examining digital communication within the broader context of family relationships. The evidence also indicates that ordinary social media use does not necessarily lead to poorer relationship quality, emphasizing the need for a balanced interpretation of technology's influence.The study concludes that healthy family interaction in the digital age requires a thoughtful combination of online communication and direct interpersonal engagement. Families can benefit from using digital tools to coordinate responsibilities, provide emotional support, and maintain contact across generations while protecting opportunities for meaningful conversation and shared activities. Parents and children should communicate openly about their expectations, respect one another's privacy, and establish reasonable boundaries for device use. Further empirical research is needed to understand how these practices operate across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Ultimately, digital communication is most beneficial when it strengthens existing family connections, supports mutual understanding, and complements rather than replaces the emotional value of direct human interaction.

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