

Social Media in Families:

A Research Proposal

Kelly Reed

Indiana Wesleyan University

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Growing social media usage in today's society has caused parent/child relationships to develop and grow differently. Parents are frequently advised to become educated in the field of social media so they will be equipped to protect their children (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). There are different ways for a parent to become educated, and one way is by engaging in the social media themselves (Xie, Watkins, Golbeck, & Huang, 2012). Multiple articles explain social media within the family; they explain how it is regulated in the home, and privacy, confidentiality, and responsibility issues. One issue missing in previous literature is a study of the relationship between children and adults because of social media. Engaging in social media as a family has the potential to positively or negatively affect relationships. This research study addresses the research question: How has social media impacted parents' relationships with their children? (RQ1).

The previous literature supports aspects of this study in specific areas of social media in families as well as broad areas such as regulation of internet usage in homes. Adults and children use social media for different reasons, and therefore, are affected in different ways. Adults were against social media a few years ago, but their perceptions have changed. When they started becoming interested, they were cautious because of privacy concerns. Now, however, they are willing to participate because of the connection benefits with old friends and family members (Xie et al., 2012). Children use it for nearly everything, mainly to be in constant conversation with friends. For children, unlike adults, it is seen as a social norm (Brown, 2011). Because of these differences in purpose, parents are finding it hard to relate to children as well as children are finding it hard to relate to parents. It creates a gap between child and parent because they cannot connect in the online world together (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). This gap can become detrimental to a family and has previously caused family problems such as domestic violence and negative effects on child well-being (Price & Dahl, 2012). To prevent these type of extreme cases, many homes are attempting to regulate internet usage all together, because it has proven challenging for parents and children to fit it into their lives properly (Livingston & Bober, 2009).

Elihu Katz's communication theory of uses and gratifications supports this study. His theory focuses on what people do with media. People consume media for different reasons, so the media has different effects on the audiences. This theory does not specify social media, but includes it (Griffin, 2011). The theory provides support that adults and children are affected differently by social media because they use it for different reasons. This study will conclude if these different effects cause relationship differences within the home.

Qualitative research is performed for this study to achieve the most beneficial information. The method used is a series of focus groups. There are eight focus groups performed in a time span of three months. They must be performed within this time period so the results are not skewed by societal changes. The study will use children from eighth grade through college, and parents with

children of those ages. It is performed to include participants from Howard County and Grant County in Indiana, to assure enough participants are available. The eight focus groups all consist of ten people, but each group is different. The samples will be taken from parents with and without social media who have children with and without social media, and from children with and without social media who have parents with and without social media. This will provide information from all perspectives of the issue. For example, one group consists of parents who live in a home with no social media at all; another group consists of parents who live in a home where social media is always present. Interviewing parents and children separately allows them to truthfully answer questions. To record these focus groups, there is a camera and audio recorder, and three note takers at each session. Questions are asked addressing the main research question: How has social media impacted parents' relationships with their children? (RQ1). They come from previously mentioned literature and are tailored to the specific groups. For example, a question for the group of children with social media and with parents who have social media is: If your parents tag you in posts or pictures, does it bother you and why? Targeting different groups with different questions will result in the most effective analysis.

A systematic process is used to analyze the collected data. The process starts by transcribing the notes. Once this is finished, the data is simplified and organized. The research questions are written down and all of the answers across all groups are recorded under each question, condensed into their essential elements. The responses are analyzed, and coding categories are determined. Once categories are made, the responses are coded. Coding the responses throughout the focus groups will establish commonalities and differences between groups. It will allow for a thorough analysis and conclusion.

This study presents an awareness to parents and children of the impacts that social media has on families. Whether or not they agree with the results when comparing them to their own family dynamics, they have received insight on the issue and can make of it what they wish. The focus groups provide first hand experiences to the issue of social media in families. The study is arranged in an effective way to inform the public of possible parent/child relationship issues.

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