



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Impact of Social Media on Social Relationships

Hamza Hassan Sheikh

*Lecturer National University Of Modern Languages, Islamabad***Abstract**

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally transformed the ways in which individuals communicate, establish relationships, maintain social networks, and participate in communities. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, X, and other digital communication services have created new opportunities for interpersonal interaction across geographical and social boundaries. Social media allows individuals to maintain relationships over distance, reconnect with old friends, participate in communities of shared interests, and develop new forms of social support. At the same time, excessive or problematic social media use has raised concerns regarding social isolation, reduced face-to-face communication, relationship conflict, privacy, cyberbullying, social comparison, and declining interpersonal trust. This research article examines the impact of social media on social relationships through a conceptual analysis of relevant literature. The theoretical framework integrates Social Presence Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Social Capital Theory, Media Richness Theory, and the Social Comparison perspective. The literature suggests that social media has both positive and negative effects on interpersonal and community relationships, and its impact depends on patterns of use, individual characteristics, relationship quality, and social context. Active and meaningful engagement can strengthen existing relationships, while passive consumption, excessive use, and dependence on online validation may contribute to dissatisfaction and social disconnection. The research adopts a qualitative conceptual methodology based on the analysis and synthesis of books and scholarly literature, with all references presented in APA style at the end of the article. The discussion highlights the dual nature of social media and argues that its effects cannot be understood simply as either beneficial or harmful. Instead, social media functions as a social environment whose consequences depend largely on how, why, and with whom it is used. Future recommendations emphasize digital literacy, balanced media use, stronger privacy awareness, responsible platform design, family communication, and further empirical research. The article concludes that social media has become an integral component of contemporary social relationships, but maintaining healthy relationships requires balancing digital communication with meaningful face-to-face interaction and developing responsible patterns of online engagement.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Relationships, Interpersonal Communication, Social Capital, Online Communication, Digital Communities, Social Interaction, Social Networking, Social Connectivity, Digital Society

Introduction

Social relationships are fundamental to human life. Individuals depend on relationships with family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and wider communities for emotional support, companionship, identity, information, and a sense of belonging. Throughout history, communication technologies have influenced how people establish and maintain these relationships. The emergence of social media represents one of the most significant transformations in the history of interpersonal communication.

Social media refers broadly to digital platforms and technologies that enable users to create, share, exchange, and interact with content and with one another. Unlike traditional mass media, which primarily involves one-way communication between institutions and audiences, social media allows individuals to become both consumers and producers of information.

The expansion of social media has changed the structure and frequency of human interaction. People can communicate instantly with others regardless of geographical distance. Family members living in different countries can exchange messages, photographs, videos, and voice or video calls. Friends can remain connected despite changes in location, employment, or lifestyle. Professional networks can be maintained through digital platforms, while communities can form around shared interests, identities, experiences, or social causes.

One of the most important contributions of social media is its ability to overcome geographical barriers. Before digital communication became widespread, maintaining long-distance relationships often required telephone calls, letters, or occasional physical visits. Social media has made continuous communication possible at relatively low cost. Individuals can observe important events in the lives of distant friends and relatives and communicate with them regularly.

Social media has also transformed the concept of community. Traditional communities are often defined by geographical proximity, whereas digital communities may connect individuals who live thousands of miles apart. People can now participate in online groups based on professional interests, hobbies, educational backgrounds, cultural identities, or personal experiences.

These developments have created new opportunities for social support. Individuals experiencing specific challenges may find online communities where they can exchange experiences and advice. Digital communities can provide a sense of belonging to individuals who may feel isolated within their immediate physical environments.

However, the influence of social media on social relationships is complex. While digital platforms can strengthen social connections, they may also create new forms of social pressure and interpersonal conflict. The constant availability of social information can produce feelings of comparison, inadequacy, jealousy, and anxiety.

Social media may also affect the quality of communication. Digital interactions often lack some of the nonverbal cues available in face-to-face communication. Tone, facial expressions, body language, and physical presence may be difficult to communicate through text-based messages. Misunderstandings can therefore occur more easily.

Another concern is the potential displacement of face-to-face interaction. Individuals who spend substantial amounts of time interacting online may reduce the time available for direct interpersonal communication. In some circumstances, people may physically be together while simultaneously focusing on their digital devices, a behavior sometimes described as technology-related social distraction.

The concept of social isolation has also received attention. Social media can connect people to large numbers of contacts, but having many online connections does not necessarily mean that individuals experience meaningful relationships. A person may have hundreds or thousands of online followers while still experiencing loneliness.

The quality of relationships may therefore be more important than the quantity of connections. Strong relationships generally involve trust, emotional support, reciprocity, understanding, and meaningful interaction. Social media can support these characteristics, but it can also encourage superficial forms of interaction.

The impact of social media also varies according to patterns of use. Active participation, such as sending personal messages, sharing meaningful experiences, and engaging in supportive conversations, may strengthen relationships. In contrast, passive consumption, such as continuously scrolling through other people's content without meaningful interaction, may contribute to social comparison and dissatisfaction.

Age and life stage may also influence the relationship between social media and social interaction. Younger people who have grown up with digital technologies may use social media as a natural extension of their social lives. Older adults may use digital platforms primarily to maintain family connections or access information.

The cultural context is equally important. Social media use occurs within existing social structures and cultural norms. In collectivist societies, digital platforms may strengthen family networks and community relationships. In other contexts, they may facilitate individual self-expression and personal identity formation.

Privacy is another important issue. Social media encourages individuals to share personal information with broad audiences. The boundaries between private and public life may become increasingly unclear. Information shared online can remain accessible for long periods and may be viewed by unintended audiences.

The commercialization of social media also affects social relationships. Many platforms depend on advertising and engagement-based business models. Algorithms may prioritize content that generates strong emotional responses because such content can increase user engagement. This can influence the information users see and potentially affect interpersonal attitudes and social interaction.

The purpose of this research article is to examine the impact of social media on social relationships. The article explores relevant theoretical perspectives, reviews existing literature, explains the conceptual research methodology, and discusses both the positive and negative effects of social media on interpersonal and community relationships.

The central argument is that social media should not be understood as inherently beneficial or harmful to social relationships. Rather, its effects depend on patterns of use, relationship context, individual characteristics, and broader social conditions. Social media can strengthen relationships when it facilitates meaningful communication and social support, but excessive or problematic use may contribute to conflict, isolation, comparison, and reduced relationship quality.

Theoretical Framework

The impact of social media on social relationships can be understood through several theoretical perspectives. This research integrates Social Presence Theory, Uses and

Gratifications Theory, Social Capital Theory, Media Richness Theory, and Social Comparison Theory.

Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory focuses on the degree to which a communication medium allows users to experience another person as psychologically present. Communication channels differ in their ability to convey social and emotional information.

Face-to-face communication generally provides a high level of social presence because participants can observe facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and immediate emotional reactions. Text-based communication provides fewer social cues, although modern social media platforms increasingly incorporate photographs, emojis, voice messages, video, and live communication.

Social media can therefore provide varying levels of social presence. A simple text message may provide less emotional information than a video call. The availability of multimedia communication allows users to select communication formats according to relationship needs.

From this perspective, social media may strengthen relationships when it provides sufficient social presence for meaningful communication. However, communication through low-presence channels may sometimes create misunderstandings.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasizes that individuals actively select media to satisfy specific needs. People may use social media for entertainment, information, social interaction, identity expression, emotional support, or companionship.

This theory suggests that the impact of social media depends partly on why individuals use it. A person who uses social media primarily to communicate with close friends may experience different outcomes from someone who uses it mainly to compare their life with others.

Social media users are therefore not passive recipients of technology. Their motivations influence the nature of their online experiences and the effects on their relationships.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory examines the resources individuals gain through social networks and relationships. Social capital may involve trust, information, support, reciprocity, and access to social resources.

Social media can contribute to social capital by maintaining existing relationships and facilitating new connections. It can help individuals maintain both strong ties and weak ties.

Strong ties involve close relationships with family members and close friends. Weak ties involve acquaintances and broader social connections. Social media can provide mechanisms for maintaining both types of relationships.

Online networks may therefore expand access to information and opportunities. However, the benefits of social capital depend on the quality and reciprocity of relationships.

Media Richness Theory

Media Richness Theory suggests that communication media differ in their capacity to convey complex information and reduce ambiguity. Rich communication channels provide multiple cues, immediate feedback, and greater opportunities for personalization.

Social media platforms vary significantly in richness. A text-based post is less rich than a live video conversation. Voice and video communication may therefore be more effective for emotionally complex or sensitive discussions.

The theory helps explain why digital communication cannot always fully replace face-to-face interaction. Some relationship situations require richer forms of communication to convey emotional meaning.

Social Comparison Perspective

Social comparison theory explains how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their lives, abilities, achievements, and appearance with those of others.

Social media provides unusually large amounts of information about other people's lives. However, this information is often selective and positively presented. Users may display achievements, celebrations, vacations, and attractive photographs while hiding difficulties and failures.

As a result, individuals may compare their ordinary experiences with the highly curated presentations of others. This can create unrealistic perceptions and dissatisfaction.

Social comparison may therefore represent one of the mechanisms through which social media negatively affects social relationships and individual well-being.

Together, these theories suggest that social media's effects depend on communication quality, user motivations, relationship resources, media characteristics, and patterns of social comparison.

Literature Review

The literature on social media and social relationships presents a complex picture. Researchers have identified both positive and negative effects, suggesting that the consequences of social media depend significantly on how individuals use digital platforms.

One of the most frequently discussed benefits is relationship maintenance. Social media allows individuals to maintain contact with people who live far away. Family members can share daily experiences, celebrate important events, and provide emotional support through digital communication.

This is particularly valuable for geographically dispersed families. Migration, education, employment, and globalization have increased the number of people living away from their families. Social media can help maintain a sense of connection despite physical distance.

Friends can also use social media to maintain relationships over time. Individuals who might otherwise lose contact after changing schools, moving cities, or starting new jobs can continue to interact online.

Social media also facilitates relationship initiation. People can meet others through shared-interest groups, online communities, professional networks, and social platforms. Some online relationships may eventually develop into strong offline friendships or other forms of interpersonal relationships.

However, the quality of online relationships varies. Some interactions may remain superficial, while others may develop into meaningful connections. The difference often depends on the degree of trust, reciprocity, personal disclosure, and sustained interaction.

Another important contribution of social media is social support. Individuals may seek emotional or informational support through online networks. Digital communities can be especially valuable for people who have limited access to support in their immediate physical environment.

Online communities can connect people who share experiences that may be difficult to discuss locally. Such communities can provide empathy and reduce feelings of isolation.

Social media can also support collective action and community engagement. Digital platforms allow individuals to organize events, coordinate activities, raise awareness, and mobilize support for social causes.

However, social media can also contribute to polarization and interpersonal conflict. Algorithms may expose users to content that reinforces existing beliefs. Online discussions can become hostile, particularly when communication occurs between individuals with different political, cultural, or social perspectives.

The reduced presence of nonverbal cues can intensify misunderstandings. A statement intended as humorous may be interpreted as offensive. Written communication may lack the contextual information necessary to understand emotional intentions.

Another major concern is cyberbullying. Digital platforms can enable harmful behavior that reaches large audiences and remains visible over time. Victims may experience significant emotional and social consequences.

The permanence and visibility of online communication can make digital conflict particularly difficult to escape. Unlike traditional interpersonal conflicts, online disputes may continue after the individuals involved have physically separated.

Privacy concerns also affect social relationships. Individuals may share personal information without fully understanding who can access it. Changes in platform settings or algorithmic practices may alter the visibility of previously shared information.

Relationship conflicts can also emerge from social media use. Partners may experience jealousy when they observe interactions between their significant others and other users. Ambiguous comments, photographs, and online friendships may create misunderstandings.

The ability to observe another person's digital activity can also create expectations of constant availability. Individuals may feel pressure to respond immediately to messages. Delayed responses can sometimes be interpreted as rejection, anger, or lack of interest.

The concept of "always-on" communication therefore has both positive and negative consequences. Constant connectivity can provide reassurance and support, but it can also create pressure and reduce opportunities for personal privacy.

Social comparison is another major concern. Social media users often encounter carefully selected presentations of other people's lives. These presentations may create unrealistic perceptions of happiness, wealth, beauty, success, or relationship quality.

Individuals who compare themselves with such content may experience dissatisfaction. This can indirectly affect relationships because people may become more focused on external validation or perceived social status.

The relationship between social media use and loneliness is particularly complex. Social media may reduce loneliness by facilitating social contact, but excessive use may also be associated with feelings of isolation.

The distinction between active and passive use is important. Active use involves direct communication and interaction, while passive use involves consuming content without meaningful participation. Active use may strengthen relationships, whereas excessive passive use may increase comparison and reduce satisfaction.

Social media can also influence family relationships. Families may use digital platforms to maintain communication and coordinate daily activities. However, excessive device use during family gatherings can reduce face-to-face interaction.

Parents may also experience challenges in managing children's social media use. Young people may become deeply involved in digital networks that parents do not fully understand.

At the same time, social media can provide adolescents with opportunities for identity development. Young people can explore interests, communicate with peers, and receive feedback from social networks.

However, adolescent users may be particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, cyberbullying, social comparison, and online exclusion.

The literature also highlights the role of social media in professional relationships. Platforms can facilitate networking,

collaboration, and professional communication. However, boundaries between personal and professional identities may become blurred.

Employers and colleagues may gain access to personal information that individuals did not intend to share professionally. This can create privacy concerns and affect workplace relationships.

Another significant development is the growth of parasocial relationships. Social media allows users to interact more directly with celebrities, influencers, and public figures. Followers may develop feelings of familiarity and emotional connection even though the relationship is largely one-sided.

These relationships demonstrate that social media has expanded the concept of social connection beyond traditional interpersonal relationships.

Overall, the literature suggests that social media has transformed social relationships by increasing connectivity, communication frequency, and access to communities. At the same time, it has introduced new challenges involving privacy, social comparison, cyberbullying, conflict, and excessive use.

The impact therefore depends on context. Social media is best understood as a tool that can facilitate relationships but cannot automatically create meaningful social connection.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative conceptual research methodology based on the analysis and synthesis of existing literature concerning social media, interpersonal communication, social relationships, digital communities, social capital, and media psychology.

The study follows a literature-based research design. Relevant books and scholarly works addressing social media communication, digital culture, social interaction, media theory, social capital, technology use, and interpersonal relationships were examined conceptually.

The first stage involved identifying theoretical perspectives relevant to social media and relationships. Social Presence Theory was used to examine the role of emotional and interpersonal cues. Uses and Gratifications Theory was applied to understand why individuals use social media. Social Capital Theory was used to explore how digital networks influence social resources and relationships.

The second stage involved examining the positive effects of social media, including relationship maintenance, social support, community formation, information exchange, and long-distance communication.

The third stage focused on potential negative effects, including social comparison, loneliness, cyberbullying, privacy concerns, relationship conflict, and excessive digital dependence.

The fourth stage involved synthesizing the literature to develop a balanced conceptual understanding of the relationship between social media use and social interaction.

No primary data were collected through surveys, interviews, or experiments. Therefore, the study does not claim to establish causal relationships between social media use and specific social outcomes.

A limitation of the methodology is that social media technologies change rapidly. Platforms, algorithms, and user behaviors evolve continuously. Consequently, findings from earlier studies may not always apply to newer digital environments.

Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative methods to examine how social media affects relationships over time. Researchers should also consider differences across age groups, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and types of social media use.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that social media has fundamentally changed the nature of contemporary social relationships. It has expanded the possibilities for communication and connection while simultaneously introducing new forms of social pressure and interpersonal difficulty.

The strongest positive effect is the ability to maintain relationships across distance. Social media enables individuals to remain connected with family and friends despite geographical separation.

This is particularly important in a globalized society where migration and mobility are common. A person living in another country can participate in family conversations, share photographs, attend virtual celebrations, and maintain emotional contact.

Social media can therefore help preserve relationships that might otherwise weaken due to physical distance.

Another benefit is the ability to provide social support. Online communities can offer emotional encouragement, practical information, and a sense of belonging.

This may be especially valuable for individuals who experience social isolation in their physical environments. Digital communities can help people discover others who share their interests or experiences.

However, the quality of online interaction remains critical. A large number of connections does not necessarily represent meaningful relationships. Social media may increase the quantity of communication without increasing its emotional depth.

Meaningful relationships require trust, reciprocity, empathy, and sustained interaction. Digital communication can support these characteristics, but it does not guarantee them.

The distinction between active and passive social media use is therefore important. Active communication, such as personal messaging and supportive conversations, is more likely to contribute positively to relationships. Passive consumption may encourage social comparison and reduce satisfaction.

Another major issue is the displacement of face-to-face communication. If individuals spend excessive time online, they may reduce opportunities for direct interpersonal interaction.

Face-to-face communication remains important because it provides rich social cues. Facial expressions, body language, tone, and physical presence allow individuals to interpret emotions more accurately.

Digital communication should therefore complement rather than completely replace direct interaction.

The problem of constant connectivity also deserves attention. Social media creates expectations of immediate responsiveness. People may feel that they must always be available to respond to messages and notifications.

This can create stress and reduce personal boundaries. Healthy relationships require periods of privacy and individual time. Excessive connectivity may make it difficult to maintain such boundaries.

Social comparison represents another significant challenge. Users often encounter idealized versions of other people's lives. These carefully selected presentations can create unrealistic standards.

When individuals compare themselves with these images, they may feel that their own lives are less successful or satisfying. Such feelings can affect self-esteem and indirectly influence relationships.

Social media may also influence romantic relationships. Couples can use digital platforms to communicate frequently and express affection. However, online interactions can also create jealousy and misunderstandings.

The visibility of social interactions can lead individuals to monitor their partners' activities. This may create mistrust and conflict.

Trust is therefore increasingly important in digital relationships. Partners must establish boundaries regarding privacy, communication, and online interactions.

Family relationships also face similar challenges. Social media can strengthen family communication but may simultaneously distract family members from one another.

The phenomenon of people physically sharing the same space while focusing on separate digital devices illustrates this tension. Technology can bring distant people closer while making nearby people feel ignored.

This paradox demonstrates that social media is not inherently social or antisocial. Its effects depend on how it is integrated into everyday life.

Another issue is cyberbullying. Digital platforms provide opportunities for harmful behavior to reach large audiences quickly. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying may occur continuously and follow victims into their homes.

Schools, families, and technology companies should therefore develop strategies to prevent and respond to online harassment.

Privacy is also central to healthy social relationships. Individuals should understand that information shared online may have long-term consequences. Digital literacy should therefore include privacy awareness and responsible information sharing.

Social media companies also have responsibilities. Platform design can influence user behavior. Features that encourage continuous engagement may contribute to excessive use.

Responsible platform design should prioritize user well-being, privacy, safety, and meaningful interaction.

The impact of social media also varies across cultures. In some societies, digital platforms strengthen extended family relationships and community networks. In others, they may emphasize individual identity and self-expression.

Therefore, researchers should avoid assuming that social media has identical effects across all populations.

Age is another important factor. Young people may use social media as an integral part of their social identity. Older adults may use it primarily for maintaining family connections.

Different age groups may therefore experience different benefits and risks.

The discussion suggests that digital literacy is essential for healthy social relationships. Individuals need to understand how algorithms influence content exposure, how online information can be curated, and how digital behavior affects relationships.

Schools and families should teach young people not only how to use technology but also how to use it responsibly.

The future of social relationships will likely involve a combination of digital and physical interaction. Social media will continue to play an important role, but face-to-face communication will remain essential.

The goal should not be to reject social media but to develop balanced patterns of use. Individuals should be encouraged to use digital platforms to strengthen meaningful relationships rather than allowing technology to replace them.

Future Recommendations

Based on the analysis, several recommendations can be proposed to maximize the positive effects of social media on social relationships.

First, individuals should develop balanced patterns of social media use. Digital communication should complement rather than replace meaningful face-to-face interaction.

Second, users should prioritize active engagement over excessive passive consumption. Direct conversations, supportive messages, and meaningful participation are more likely to strengthen relationships than continuous scrolling.

Third, digital literacy education should be expanded. Individuals should learn about privacy, online safety,

misinformation, cyberbullying, and responsible communication.

Fourth, families should establish healthy technology boundaries. Dedicated periods without digital devices can encourage face-to-face communication and strengthen family relationships.

Fifth, parents and educators should help young people develop responsible social media habits. Discussions should focus on online behavior, emotional well-being, privacy, and social comparison.

Sixth, social media platforms should strengthen mechanisms for preventing cyberbullying, harassment, and abusive behavior. Reporting systems should be accessible and effective.

Seventh, technology companies should prioritize privacy protection. Users should have greater control over their personal information and understand how their data are used.

Eighth, individuals should be encouraged to critically evaluate social media content. Users should recognize that online profiles often present selective and idealized versions of reality.

Ninth, romantic partners should communicate openly about digital boundaries. Clear expectations regarding privacy, messaging, and online friendships can reduce misunderstandings.

Tenth, researchers should conduct more longitudinal studies to understand the long-term effects of social media on relationship quality, loneliness, and social capital.

Eleventh, future research should distinguish between different types of social media use. Measuring only the amount of time spent online may not adequately capture the relationship between technology and social outcomes.

Twelfth, policymakers and educators should consider cultural differences when developing digital literacy and social media policies.

Finally, future research should examine the influence of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and immersive digital environments, on social relationships. These technologies may further transform the boundaries between online and offline social interaction.

Conclusion

Social media has become an integral component of contemporary social life and has fundamentally transformed how individuals communicate and maintain relationships. It enables people to connect across geographical boundaries, maintain contact with distant family and friends, participate in communities, exchange information, and receive social support.

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that social media has both positive and negative consequences for social relationships. Its benefits include improved communication, relationship maintenance, community formation, social support, and access to diverse social networks.

At the same time, excessive or problematic use may contribute to social comparison, loneliness, cyberbullying, privacy concerns, relationship conflict, and reduced face-to-face interaction.

The theoretical perspectives discussed in this article demonstrate that the impact of social media depends on multiple factors. Social Presence Theory highlights the importance of communication quality and emotional cues. Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasizes the motivations behind social media use. Social Capital Theory explains how digital networks can provide social resources. Media Richness Theory demonstrates that different communication channels have different capacities to convey complex social information. The social comparison perspective highlights the psychological consequences of exposure to carefully curated representations of other people's lives.

The most important conclusion is that social media itself is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful. Its effects depend largely on how individuals use it, why they use it, and how digital communication is integrated into existing relationships. When used intentionally, social media can strengthen relationships by allowing individuals to communicate regularly, provide emotional support, maintain long-distance connections, and participate in meaningful communities. However, when use becomes excessive, passive, or dependent on external validation, it may weaken relationship quality and contribute to social dissatisfaction.

The future of social relationships will likely involve increasing integration between digital and physical communication. The objective should therefore not be to eliminate social media but to promote healthy and responsible patterns of use.

Individuals, families, educational institutions, governments, and technology companies all have roles to play in creating healthier digital environments. Users need digital literacy and self-regulation. Families need healthy communication practices. Schools should educate young people about responsible online behavior. Technology companies should prioritize safety, privacy, and user well-being.

Ultimately, meaningful social relationships require more than connectivity. They require trust, empathy, reciprocity, emotional understanding, and genuine human engagement. Social media can provide valuable tools for supporting these qualities, but it cannot replace the fundamental human need for authentic connection.

A sustainable approach to social media use therefore involves balance. Digital platforms should be used as tools to enhance relationships rather than substitutes for real human interaction. By combining the advantages of digital communication with the emotional depth of face-to-face relationships, individuals and communities can benefit from social media while minimizing its potential harms.

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