Research Paper: Communication Challenges of Parents and Their Adolescent Daughters With an Emphasis on Social Media Use: A Content Analysis Study

Bahareh Boor Boor[1] ⓘ, Anahita Khodabakhshi-Koolaee[2*] ⓘ, Mohammad Reza Falsafinezhad[3] ⓘ

1. Department of Counseling, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran.
3. Department of Assessment and Measurement, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Background: Challenge between parents and their children is a rapidly growing phenomenon in Iran. The communication challenges of adolescence with emphasis on social media in this study is a phenomenon that based on the changes and developments of adolescence, can affect the nature and quality of family relationships, question the parental authority, and cause changes in regulations. The present study explored the communication challenges of parents and adolescents with a focus on the use of the Internet and social media.

Methods: This qualitative study was performed using content analysis. The research population consisted of several parents with children (daughters) who were studying in the first secondary school in District 11 of Tehran in the academic year 2019-2020. The participants were 15 parents who were selected using purposive sampling and based on the theoretical saturation criterion. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were then analyzed, codified, and categorized. Finally, after the extraction of the themes, the relevant and common themes were combined in the form of secondary and main categories.

Results: Based on the content analysis of the data collected from the interviews, 4 main categories were identified: social media opportunities, social media coping strategies, social media problems from the parents' point of view, and communication problems with the child.

Conclusion: In the modern world, parent-adolescent communication challenges are intermingled with the common challenges of using social media. However, it is impossible to ignore the effective and useful presence of social media in modern life. Acquiring knowledge, training conflict resolution skills, and recognizing the factors related to conflicts between parents and adolescents can help parents and pave the way for reducing parent-adolescent conflicts and improving the quality of parent-adolescent communication concerning social media use.

* **Corresponding Author:**
Anahita Khodabakhshi-Koolaee, PhD.
Address: *Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran.*
Phone: *+98 (21) 89174119*
E-mail: *a.khodabakhshid@khatam.ac.ir*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a stage in a person's life cycle, in which the adolescent undergoes extensive physical, cognitive, moral, and behavioral changes. The family as the first place for individual development is of great importance [1]. Family is the first environment that affects a person. The family environment and the way parents communicate with and respond to their children are highly important. Parent-child interaction, family structure, parent-child shared experiences, how roles are divided among family members, power relationships in the family, how to deal with and solve problems, how to train and control behavior, and solidarity all affect the adolescent [1, 2].

The family as the smallest social unit can be affected by changes in the world, of which the development of the world of technology and communication can be mentioned. The Internet and media have also affected parent-child relationships. Media are available for children and young people in modern families. Currently, many parental educations are provided through various applications or software programs. Over time, parents seem to be engaged in a constant battle with their children. They have sought to balance the educational and social benefits of using social media with the negative effects that some content or communication may have on children's attitudes, behaviors, or safety [3-5].

Today, the use of the Internet is increasing in a wide range of domains. Online environments highly affect human life. Accordingly, the consequences of using the Internet as a communication tool have attracted the attention of researchers in the fields of psychology and sociology [6, 7]. Cyberspace is a new generation of social media space that although is not very old, has been able to be considered by people affecting their lives. Many people of different ages and from different social groups come together in social media and communicate with each other from far away distances in the real world [8, 9]. Currently, communication with others through the Internet has increased. Email, text messaging, chat rooms, websites, and online games have become ways to expand and maintain social relationships. Since social media use is a time-consuming activity, it reduces the amount of interaction and communication people have with each other in the real world, and in the meantime, young people due to having more free time spend more time using social media than adults [10-13].

Studies have pointed to the positive and negative effects of the Internet on the relationship between parents and children in the family [14, 15]. If we accept that the trend of life in this century is becoming electronicized and electronic life is an emerging reality, then, we will find out that no aspect of human life will be immune from the effects of this phenomenon, namely electronicization [15-17].

Thus, a major challenge for research in this area is to identify the factors that increase the positive and negative impacts of the Internet on adolescent and family relationships. To examine in depth the communication problems of adolescent girls and their parents about the excessive use of cyberspace, it was necessary to conduct a thorough interview and examine the beliefs of both parents and adolescents in Iran. Therefore, the present study examined the communication challenges of parents and female adolescents concerning the use of the Internet and social media through face-to-face conversations and interviews using a qualitative and content analysis methodology based on the lived experiences of parents who have been involved in this phenomenon.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative method based on content analysis. The qualitative approach discovers theories, concepts, hypotheses, and theorems via a regular process directly from the data, instead of inferring them from previous assumptions and the existing theoretical frameworks [18]. The content analysis process requires the use of several stages of data collection, revision, and study of the relationships between information categories. In qualitative studies, especially those conducted based on content analysis, data are collected using exploratory interviews, and data collection and analysis are performed simultaneously to help the discovery of the theory underlying the data. The collected data were analyzed simultaneously with the sampling procedure using a five-step qualitative content analysis method (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004): (1) Transcribing the recorded interviews, (2) Reviewing the transcripts to come up with a general understanding of the content, (3) Identifying meaningful units and primary codes, (4) Classifying the primary codes into broader categories, and (5) Specifying the latent concepts [19, 20].

Accordingly, to determine the effective factors in parent-daughter communication challenges related to social media use, this study explored the narratives of parents who experienced challenges in relationships with their adolescent girls concerning social media use.

After reviewing the literature, several questions were developed for semi-structured interviews. The questions were checked in terms of content and adequacy by several experts and researchers in the field of family and adolescents. After drafting the final questions, the parents who referred to counseling and psychology clinics, both private and public, in district 11 of Tehran in 2019 to solve communication problems in relationships with their adolescent girls were interviewed to identify the communication challenges of parents and children with an emphasis on social media use.

The participants were 15 parents who met the inclusion criteria and were selected using purposive sampling. The data were saturated after fifteen interviews as no new information or themes were observed in the data analysis process. The data analysis was performed simultaneously with the data collection procedure until the data were saturated. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes da one hour. Before starting the interviews, the researcher provided the participants with some explanations about the confidentiality of their information and obtained written consent from the subjects. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and were then transcribed carefully. The transcripts of the interviews were then analyzed. The systematic method was used to examine the content of the interviews and conceptualize and extract categories. In the systematic research design based on the qualitative method, the data are analyzed through content analysis [21].

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the credibility and trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba were used [22-24]. The validity of the research process was further confirmed by choosing the right context, the data triangulation of the collected data with previous studies on the communication challenges of parents and their adolescent children with an emphasis on social media use, the experiences of parents and close and continuous participation and engagement of the participants in the interpretation of the data, referring to the participants for further clarification, and recording the procedures taken to conduct the study to provide the possibility of the review by others. Written consent was obtained from the participants for conducting and recording the interviews, voluntary participation in and withdrawal from the study, and confidentiality of the participants' information, including their names, phone numbers, and addresses. Besides, the recorded interviews were transcribed by the researchers.

3. Results

The participants were 15 parents, aged 37 to 54 years, with the education level varying from a high school diploma to a master's degree, who had communication challenges with their adolescent children. The participants' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

The number of initial codes was 117 codes, of which 17 subcategories were extracted, and then four main categories were presented. Table 2 shows the extracted initial subcategories and main codes. The factors underlying parent-child challenges concerning social media use are divided into 4 main themes (main categories): social media opportunities, strategies to cope with social media, social media problems from the parents' perspectives, and communication problems with children.

Social media opportunities: As shown in Table 3, one of the main categories of parental challenges related to social media use was social media opportunities, including education/research, quick access to information, and new online shopping and registration. The opportunity to use virtual networks is great, as one of the participants pointed to the following issues:

"*Proper use of social media for research and study, art education, scientific content, research, fast communication with the world and access to up-to-date scientific materials and contents, testing content and solving exercises and useful video clips and games, access to science around the world, access to informative videos and clips, use of encyclopedias and useful scientific websites, use of scientific sites to strengthen scientific abilities, access to sample questions in various channels, scientific art websites*" (father, 44 years).

Strategies to cope with social media: The second main category of parental challenges related to social media use covered the strategies to cope with social media that were subcategorized into study and leisure time, getting help from a counselor, and promoting communication skills.

One of the mothers referred to: "*The social media to fill children's free time with sports, study, training programs, scientific and educational programs, and online courses. But sometimes, you as a mother should seek the help of a counselor*" (mother, 39 years).

Social media problems from the parents' perspective: The third category of the parents' communication challenges in dealing with the way children use social

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Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics

No.	Child's Age	Parent's Age	Education	Field of Study	Occupation	Number of Children	Devices Used to Access Social Media	Time Spent on Social Media
1	15	37	Bachelor	Educational sciences	Teacher	1	Tablet & phone	<6 hours
2	15	47	Diploma	Math & Physics	Housewife	2	Tablet & computer	4-6 hours
3	15	42	Bachelor	Technical and vocational training	Vice-principal	1	Tablet	4 hours
4	15	49	Bachelor	Educational technology	Kindergarten manager	2	Laptop & phone	4-6 hours
5	15	43	Bachelor	Computer engineering	Housewife	1	Tablet	<4 hours
6	14	38	Bachelor	Insurance studies	Insurance clerk	1	Tablet	3 hours
7	14	39	Bachelor	Chemistry	Housewife	2	Phone	<2 hours
8	13	38	Master	Midwifery	Midwife	2	Tablet	3-4 hours
9	13	40	Master	Visual arts	Art teacher	2	Phone	<3 hours
10	14	39	Diploma	Experimental sciences	Housewife	3	Tablet	2 hours
11	13	37	Associate	Graphics	Housewife	2	Computer	3 hours
12	14	46	Bachelor	Islamic instructions	Housewife	2	Phone	3 hours
13	14	54	Bachelor	Nursing	Retired employee	2	Tablet & phone	<3 hours
14	13	44	Diploma	Humanities	Housewife	3	Laptop	2-4 hours
15	14	40	Master	Physical education	Sports teacher	2	Tablet & phone	2-4 hours

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media covered social media problems from the parent's perspective. This category included subthemes, such as spending time with bad friends, educational problems, isolation, familiarity with foreign cultures, wasting time, sexual problems/premature puberty, promoting impulsive buying, deceptions in social media, and adverse effects from the peer group.

One of the mother's point out the following issues: "*The children are surfing the Internet and social media, which causes premature physical and sexual maturity, contact with the opposite sex, sexually inappropriate content, high-risk relationships, the temptation to communicate with the opposite sex, watching videos on social media sometimes causes the child to have poor performance at work and school, watching movies and playing games with sexually inappropriate content, destructive friendships, high-risk and anti-value behaviors, friendships with the opposite sex, sexual issues, lack of privacy, and homosexuality*" (mother, 46 years).

Communication problems with the child: As shown in Table 2, the last category of the parents' communica-

tion challenges in dealing with the way children use social media was communication problems with the child, including inattention to others, engaging in immoral behaviors, and showing disrespect toward parents.

One of the father's said that "*The child's behavior changed considerably due to the content she is exposed to on her mobile phone, uses bad language and words, privacy violation, disregard for advice and instructions in the family, inattention to the parents' demands, orders, and expectations*" (father, 54 years).

Figure 1 summarizes the communication challenges faced by the parents concerning social media use by children. As shown, parent-adolescent daughter communication challenges, which are an inevitable part of adolescence, are intertwined with the common challenges of using social media by children in the modern world. Parental communication challenges concerning social media use by children are classified into 4 main categories, including social media opportunities, strategies to cope with social media, social media problems from the parents' perspectives, and communication problems with children.

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Table 2. Some examples of the meaning units, condensed meaning units, and codes

Meaning Codes	Condensed Meaning Units	Meaning Codes
Proper use of social media for research and study, art education, scientific content, research, fast communication with the world and access to up-to-date scientific information and contents, testing the content and solving exercises and useful video clips and games, access to science around the world, access to informative videos and clips, the use of encyclopedias and useful scientific websites, the use of scientific sites to strengthen scientific abilities, access to sample questions in various channels, scientific art websites.	Education/research	Social media opportunities
Easy access to useful content and information, answering questions, useful social, art, and culinary channels, opportunities, such as distance learning of useful scientific topics all over the world.	Quick access to information	
Registration is easier through the Internet, saving time, opportunities, such as online shopping, online businesses, exchange of useful information, websites, such as Snap.	New online shopping and registration	
Filling children's free time with sports, study, training programs, scientific and educational programs, and online courses .	Study and leisure time	Strategies to cope with social media
Sometimes you should seek the help of a counselor.	Getting help from a counselor	
Talking, encouraging, listening well to children, raising the children's awareness of social media use, parental supervision, talking and explaining.	Promoting communication skills	
Making friends without any knowledge and control, negative and annoying thoughts, communication issues, choosing friends.	Bad friends	
School dropout, lack of education on social media use for children, academic failure, lower creativity, inattention to activities and tasks related to the children themselves and studies.	Educational problems	
Isolation and lack of proper emotional connection with family members, a deep generation gap between the child and parents from the child's perspective.	Isolation	
Familiarity with foreign cultures, the child's exposure to the content that is not very compatible with our values and culture, inappropriate and violent games incompatible with our values and culture, disregard for religious issues and praying, no paying attention to moral issues, taking part in dangerous challenges, familiarity with anti-cultural issues.	Familiarity with foreign cultures	
Because the child spends a lot of time on social media, she falls behind in her work, she spends time in vain, she wastes time chatting with friends, she uses bad language and words. I feel that adolescents are very emotional and do not use their minds much, wandering in different and unfamiliar websites and sitting in a corner at home, and spent time on social media and this does not allow them to develop their thinking and intellectual abilities.	Wasting time	Social media problems from the parents' perspective
Surfing the Internet and social media causes premature physical and sexual maturity, contact with the opposite sex, sexually inappropriate content, high-risk relationships, the temptation to communicate with the opposite sex, watching videos on social media sometimes causes the child to have poor performance at work and school, watching movies and playing games with sexually inappropriate content, destructive friendships, high-risk and anti-value behaviors, friendships with the opposite sex, sexual issues, lack of privacy, homosexuality.	Sexual problems/premature puberty	
Uninvited Internet sales and purchases, buying unnecessary items impulsively, the child wants to buy everything advertised on social media.	Promoting impulsive buying	
Deceptions and lies posted on social media. Unfortunately, teenagers are soon deceived by glamor, scams, and cybercrimes.	Deceptions in social media	
Suicide/self-harm, chatting with strangers, confusion, and anxiety about friendships that are constantly mixed with sulks and reconciliation, tendency to use drugs, risky behaviors, irritability.	Adverse effects from the peer group	
Our child does not have a good relationship with us but listens to what I say. The reason may be that she is afraid of me. She does not hang out with anybody and prefers to sit in a corner checking her mobile phone.	Communication problems with the child	Communication problems with the child
Inattention to others, inattention to one's own food and nutrition, no observance of personal health, having stress and anxiety while using the phone, she likes to be alone at home.	Inattention to others	
Clothing and hijab issues, engaging in immoral behaviors, the exchange of unsuitable words and images, watching sexually inappropriate clips and movies.	Engaging in immoral behaviors	
The child's behavior changed considerably due to the content she is exposed to on her mobile phone, using bad language and words, privacy violation, disregard for advice and instructions in the family, inattention to the parents' demands, orders, and expectations.	Showing disrespect toward parents	

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Table 3. Sub-categories, categories, and the emerged theme from content analysis

Theme Categories	Parents Challenge With Their Adolescent Girls for Social Media Use			
	Social Media Opportunities	Strategies to Cope With Social Media	Social Media Problems From the Parents' Perspective	Communication Problems With the Child
Sub-categories	Education/research	Study and leisure time	Bad friends	Communication problems with the child
	Quick access to information	Getting help from a counselor	Educational problems	Inattention to others
	New online shopping and registration	Promoting communication skills	Isolation	Engaging in immoral behaviors
			Familiarity with foreign cultures	Showing disrespect toward parents
			Wasting time	
			Sexual problems/premature puberty	
			Promoting impulsive buying	
			Deceptions in social media	
			Adverse effects from the peer group	

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4. Discussion

The present study explored the communication challenges faced by parents concerning the use of the Internet and social media by their children. Based on the data from the interviews with the parents, the communication challenges were classified into four main categories: social media opportunities, strategies to cope with social media, social media problems from the parents' perspectives, and communication problems with children. Social media opportunities were further subcategorized into education/research, quick access to information, and new online shopping and registration. This finding is consistent with the results of Livingstone, who identified the instances of social media use by adolescents [7]. Similarly, other studies considered social media and the Internet as tools for new opportunities and progress [8-10]. Accordingly, it can be suggested that due to the increasing growth of information and communication technologies, social media have become an integral part of families' lives and are used for activities, such as quick access to information, reducing unnecessary visits to service centers, enriching educational and research activities, and accessing various and up-to-date content in the field of education, facilitating the registration process for exams, and online shopping. All participants in this study emphasized and acknowledged the opportunities created by social media.

Some of the strategies suggested by the parents to manage social media and prevent their adverse effects were study and leisure courses, getting help from counselors, and promoting communication skills. Wang et al. and Livingstion et al. suggested that adolescents with highly strict parents showed fewer abnormal Internet behaviors, and adolescents with abnormal Internet use lived in families with the least communication and parental support [12, 14].

Besides, Livingstone et al. and Smahelova et al. have pointed to the positive effects of counseling, communication skills training, participation in therapy sessions, and the use of counseling approaches in resolving parent-adolescent conflicts and challenges [12, 15]. The results of the present study are also in line with the studies by Hooft Gruafland et al. and Webster et al on planning leisure time and activities. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a suitable space for adolescents to spend their leisure time [16, 17]. Otherwise, they will spend a large part of their free time on social media. Other factors underlying parent-adolescent challenges and conflicts in dealing with how children use social media are the lack of awareness, poor communication skills, and ineffective cognitive perceptions. Therefore, using guidance and counseling services and improving communication skills help to come up with effective solutions when conflict arises by speaking and listening effectively, without criticism, insult, or threats [21, 22].
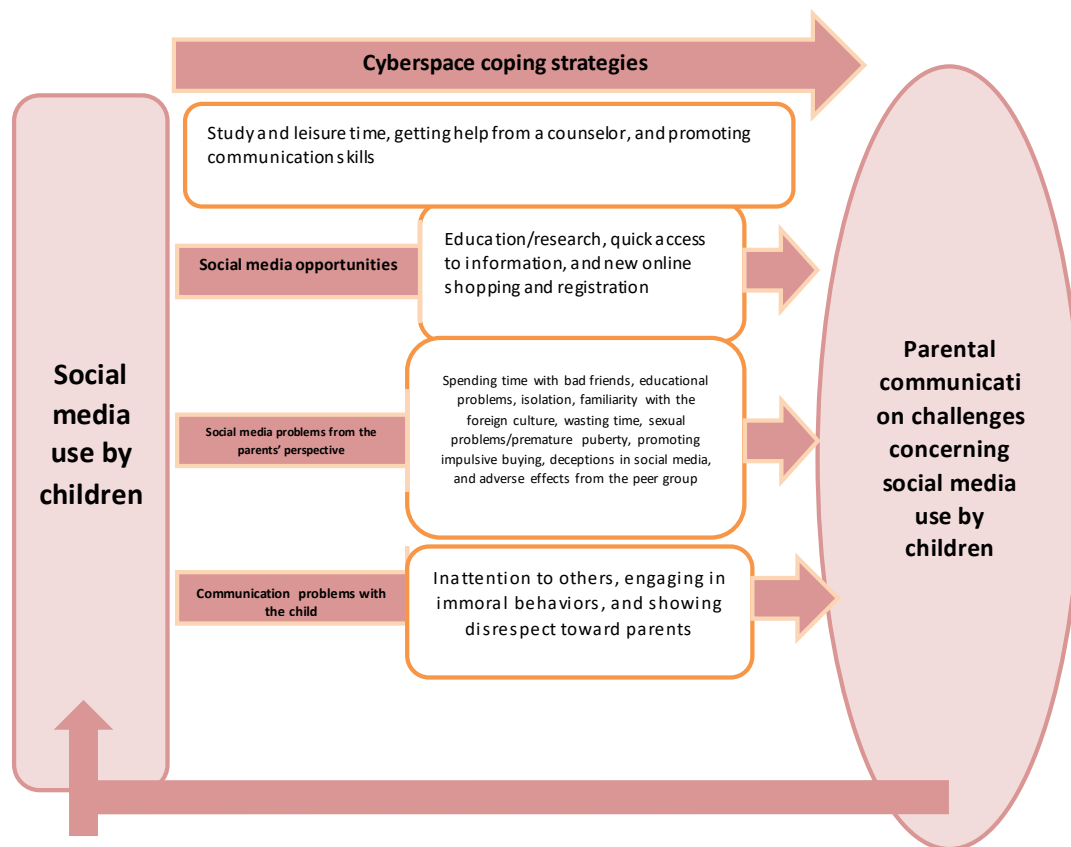
Figure 1. Parental communication challenges concerning social media use by children

Besides, social media problems from the perspective of sub-parents included spending time with bad friends, educational problems, isolation, familiarity with foreign cultures, wasting time, sexual problems/premature puberty, promoting impulsive buying, deceptions in social media, and adverse effects from the peer group, as was evident in the previous studies [15-17]. Knowing the needs between parents and children can help them better understand their relationships. For example, Sajjadi et al. indicated that the needs assessment-based educational program can promote the opinion of parents about the puberty period in male adolescents [25, 26]. Therefore, it can be suggested that social media can be the core for the formation of fraudulent and norm-breaking groups.

Given the impossibility of identifying the true identity of members and controlling the content produced by social media users, one of the most important negative consequences of these networks is the rapid formation and promotion of rumors and fake news posted by some members of social media with specific purposes. Currently, social media use has affected identity seeking by the young generation in terms of the intellectual, moral, and identity aspects, leading to providing grounds for social, moral, and cultural harm to adolescents. Profiteers easily advertise their goods and products through the Internet, send fake news to communities, break the cultural grandeur and morals, and identity of children in families, and create grounds for the confusion of teenagers. Internet relationships, due to their virtual and false nature and undermining the traditional concepts of loyalty and true love, severely threaten human life. In social media, games are mostly played individually, and participation, thinking, and teamwork as conventional constructive features games, are less visible because, in these games, there is no place for face-to-face confrontation, eye contact, and human interactions. Hence, the participation of individuals, especially children, and adolescents, in social activities gradually decreases, and isolationism, introversion, and the decline of social relations become the normal practice. Currently, the Internet has replaced friends and relatives in social life and acts as a substitute for friendships and family relationships. People who spend hours on the Internet violate many social values because such people abandon their social activities and turn to individual activities. The Internet weakens interactions and strengthens the possibility of deception and lies among users. Therefore, social media, despite their positive effects and their ability for creating vast and wonderful political, social, and cultural changes in hu-

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man societies, have resulted in negative and threatening effects, and their destructive role has undermined some social values and norms leading to serious damages to society, and currently, social life faces risks and threats due to the dominance and spread of social media.

According to the results of this study, the communication problems with the child was subcategorized into inattention to others, engaging in immoral behaviors, and disregard for parents, as highlighted in previous studies, like those by Wolack et al., Jackson et al., and Rosen et al. [27-29]. Accordingly, it can be suggested that social media have caused changes in the speech, behavior, and morality of the new generation.

The emergence of new technologies and social media has created a fundamental change in parent-child relationships. Social media have affected the quality of the formation of family relationships and values. Changes in moral values, the generation gap due to the growth of technology, loss of privacy between parents and children, and the decline of values in parent-child relationships are some consequences of social media use by children [30, 31].

This study was conducted with some limitations. For instance, the sample was female adolescents. Besides, given the constant changes occurring during adolescence, the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship may not be constant and unchanging over time. Therefore, it is recommended to perform longitudinal studies to provide a more comprehensive view of the problem.

5. Conclusion

These findings indicate that today, with the advent of new communication and information technologies in social media, the relationship between parents and children has also changed, and parent-adolescent communication challenges as an inevitable part of adolescence have been intermingled with common challenges of using social media. Besides, it is impossible to ignore the effective and useful presence of social media in modern life. Families are grappling with these problems and trying to adapt to the new challenges posed by Internet access. Acquiring knowledge and training in conflict resolution skills and recognizing the factors associated with conflicts between parents and adolescents can help parents and pave the way for reducing conflicts and having better communication with children.

Ethical Considerations

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