SIBLING DYNAMICS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the influence of social media on adolescent sibling relationships in the digital era. The research examines how platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and

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TikTok shape sibling communication, emotional bonds, and conflict resolution. By analyzing adolescents' experiences, the study identifies both the strengthening effects of digital connectivity and the challenges introduced by online rivalry and social comparison. It addresses a critical research gap in understanding sibling dynamics mediated through digital platforms, offering insights into how social media redefines familial bonds.

Key Words: Sibling dynamics, social media, adolescence, digital communication, family relationships

Chapter I

Introduction

In today's digital age, adolescents increasingly rely on technology for socialization, with social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok becoming central to their interactions. Research indicates that social media affects adolescents' communication patterns, creating new opportunities for connection while also introducing challenges.[1] These platforms not only shape broader social relationships but also profoundly influence sibling dynamics during formative years.[2]

Sibling relationships serve as an important foundation for personal and social development by influencing emotional well-being, conflict resolution, and providing a sense of belonging.[3] Strong sibling bonds, characterized by open and frequent communication, often provide emotional support and serve as a buffer during family or personal challenges. However, these dynamics are influenced by several factors such as age gap, birth order, and parenting styles, which determine whether sibling interactions are seen as supportive, competitive, or conflictual.[4]

Additionally, the rise of social media has also influenced sibling relationships. While digital platforms can enhance connectivity and

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[1] Vaterlaus, J. M., Jones, R. M., & Tulane, S., "Perceived sibling influence on social media use: A retrospective report," *Journal of Family Issues* 40(3), (2019) 274-294.

[2] Ciciora, P. *Siblings play formative, influential role as 'agents of socialization,'* University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (2010, January 15), Retrieved from https://www.news.illinois.edu/view/6367/205739, accessed on November 4, 2024.

[3] Vaterlaus, J. M., Dodson, M., & Bock, S. H. "Young Adults' Closest Sibling Relationships and Interactive Technology," *Marriage & Family Review* 59(3), (2023) 203–228.

[4] Buist, K. L., Deković, M., & Prinzie, P. "Sibling relationship quality and psychopathology of children and adolescents: A meta-analysis," *Clinical Psychology Review 33(1),* (2013) 97-106.

create shared experiences, they can also amplify rivalry, foster social comparisons, and intensify conflicts.[5] For example, the public nature of online personas may lead siblings to compare achievements or popularity, increasing feelings of jealousy or competition.[6] At the same time, the ability to communicate asynchronously via social media or messaging apps offers unique opportunities for conflict resolution and emotional growth.[7] Given the evolving digital landscape, there is a need for a deeper understanding of its impact on sibling relationships, particularly its role in fostering or hindering emotional bonds and mutual understanding.[8]

Hence, this study seeks to explore the dual impact of digital platforms on adolescent sibling relationships, examining how social media reshapes communication patterns, emotional bonds, and shared experiences. By analyzing both positive and negative influences, the research aims to contribute to developmental psychology by addressing gaps in understanding the role of technology in sibling dynamics. The findings hope to inform and contribute to the development of strategies that promote healthier relationships by balancing digital and offline interactions.

Review of Literature

The digital era has profoundly reshaped interpersonal interactions, including family dynamics, particularly sibling relationships. Social media has emerged as a dominant communication mode for adolescents, providing opportunities for connection while posing challenges. This review explores the influence of digital platforms on sibling relationships, emphasizing their impact on communication, emotional bonding, and conflict resolution. By analyzing prior studies, the review sheds light on how virtual interactions shape sibling dynamics within the context of adolescent development.

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[5] Coyne, S. M., Padilla-Walker, L. M., & Howard, E. "Emerging in a digital world: A decade review of media use, effects, and gratifications in emerging adulthood," *Emerging Adulthood 1(2)*, (2013) 125-137.

[6] Luijkx, J., van der Putten, A. A. J., & Vlaskamp, C. "I love my sister, but sometimes I don't": A qualitative study into the experiences of siblings of a child with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities, *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 41(4), (2016) 279–288.

[7] Mesch, G. S. "Family relations and the Internet: Exploring a family boundaries approach," *The Journal of Family Communication* 6(2), (2006)119-138.

[8] Miller, R. L. *The digital age and family dynamics: Understanding technology's role in modern relationships,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships are among the most enduring and influential connections in a person's life, significantly contributing to one's social, emotional, and psychological development. These relationships, ranging from nurturing to conflictual, are shaped by factors such as age gaps, birth order, and family dynamics. Research highlights their complexity and pivotal role in personal growth and well-being.

Sibling relationships that are facilitated by digital connections have demonstrated positive effects. Hamwey, Rolan, Jensen, and Whiteman revealed that as siblings transition to emerging adulthood, geographic separation reduces physical proximity but deepens the quality of conversations, emphasizing emotional support.[9] Stocker and Lanthier also reviewed how technology can be used to maintain sibling bonds, despite its evolution across life stages. The nature of sibling relationships whether supportive or conflictual, determines how effectively technology is utilized to sustain closeness.[10] Huang found that text-based communication influenced sibling dynamics, wherein warmth in relationships corresponded to positive digital exchanges, while high rivalry exacerbated miscommunications.[11] Wilkins-Clark, Markham, and Ferraro emphasized the importance of intentionality behind communication, demonstrating that meaningful interactions, rather than frequency alone, strengthen sibling bonds.[12] Similarly, Hays found that trust and warmth mitigate potential conflicts arising from communication delays in digital interactions.[13]

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[9] Hamwey, M. K., Rolan, E. P., Jensen, A. C., & Whiteman, S. D. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder": A qualitative examination of sibling relationships during emerging adulthood, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 36(8), (2019) 2487–2506. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518789514, accessed on November 5, 2024.

[10] Stocker, C. M., & Lanthier, R. P. "Sibling relationships across the lifespan: The impact of technology on emotional closeness and conflict resolution," *Journal of Family Studies* 36(4), (2020) 512-530.

[11] Huang, Q. Emerging adults' sibling relationships and inter-sibling communication: General communication patterns and chronemic expectation violation in a text-based interaction, (2021). https://hdl.handle.net/2152/94690, accessed on October 30, 2024.

[12] Wilkins-Clark, R. E., Markham, M. S., & Ferraro, A. J. Meaning Making and Communication Influences on Perceptions of Sibling Closeness among Emerging Adults, *Marriage & Family Review* 58(7), (2022) 587–618.

[13] Hays, M. A Qualitative Study Exploring the Impact of Anxiety on the Sibling Relationship, PCOM Psychology Dissertations, (2022). https://digitalcommons.pcom.edu/psychology_dissertations/587, accessed on October 30, 2024

On the other hand, digital communication can also produce negative effects. Vaterlaus, Dodson, and Bock explored the dual impact of technology on sibling relationships. While it facilitated regular communication among geographically separated siblings, over-reliance on digital interactions sometimes led to feelings of disconnect, underscoring the need for balance in technology use.[14]

Social Media

Social media significantly influences adolescent and young adult relationships by shaping their identity, self-expression, and emotional management. These platforms offer opportunities for connection and support but also introduce challenges like social comparison, peer pressure, and cyberbullying.

Grotevant and Cooper demonstrated that shared emotional experiences via digital communication strengthened sibling bonds.[15] Similarly, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe highlighted the role of social media in fostering connection and reducing loneliness among geographically separated siblings.[16] Vitak, Ellison, and Steinfield found that features like tagging and shared memories on social platforms sustain familial interactions and mutual support.[17] Ahn and Shin also noted that shared online activities, such as gaming and content sharing, foster sibling connections, particularly for those living apart.[18] For Coyne, McDaniel, and Stockdale, social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram provide emotional support during family stressors, enabling siblings to express empathy and maintain closeness.[19] It can also facilitate conflict resolution, according

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[14] Vaterlaus, J. M., Dodson, M., & Bock, S. H. "Young Adults' Closest Sibling Relationships and Interactive Technology," *Marriage & Family Review* 59(3), (2023) 203–228.

[15] Grotevant, H. D., & Cooper, C. R. "Individuality and connectedness in adolescent development," *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology,* (2006) 77–90.

[16] Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. "The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4), (2007) 1143–1168.

[17] Vitak, J., Ellison, N. B., & Steinfield, C. "The influence of Facebook 'friends' on social capital: A study of college students' use of online social network sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4), (2011) 1143–1168.

[18] Ahn, J., & Shin, D. H. "Is the social use of media for everyone? Application of the media multiplicity theory to social media use," *Cyber psychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 16(5), (2013) 301–307.

[19] Coyne, S. M., McDaniel, B. T., & Stockdale, L. A. "Do digital devices enhance or hinder familial relationships? A review," *Marriage & Family Review*, 56(5), (2020) 409-425.

to Morris as digital platforms can also become a less confrontational space for this purpose.[20]

However, there are also detrimental effects as Uhls, Ellison, and Subrahmanyam cautioned against the risks of excessive social media use, which may lead to mental health challenges and unhealthy comparisons, affecting sibling dynamics.[21]

Challenges

While digital platforms enhance connectivity, they also introduce risks such as rivalry, isolation, and diminished relationship quality. Momineen, Sultana, and Aziz emphasized how smartphones exacerbate sibling conflicts due to disputes over device use.[22] Bražinová and Caletková identified digital addiction as a factor negatively affecting sibling interactions, particularly among vulnerable populations.[23] These studies underscore the dual role of digital technology in sibling relationships, highlighting the importance of balanced use. However, future research should focus on mitigating the adverse effects of technology while leveraging its potential to strengthen familial bonds. This study contributes to developmental psychology by investigating the influence of social media and messaging apps on adolescent sibling dynamics, particularly their role in shaping communication and emotional bonds in the digital era.

While existing studies have explored the impact of social media on adolescent behavior and personality development, research specifically addressing sibling dynamics in the digital age remains limited. There is a need for qualitative insights into how adolescents personally navigate their sibling relationships through digital communication. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how digital platforms strengthen or weaken sibling bonds, exploring the

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[20] Morris, M. E. "Digital Platforms and Conflict Resolution in Family Relationships," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38(7), (2021) 1903–1919.

[21] Uhls, Y. T., Ellison, N. B., & Subrahmanyam, K. *Benefits and Costs of Social Media in Adolescence, Paediatrics* 140 (Supplement_2), (2017) S67–S70. https://doi.org/ 10.1542/peds.2016-1758E.

[22] Momineen, F. ul, Sultana, S., & Aziz, S. "Sibling Rivalry Reloaded: The Role of Smartphones in Conflict and Resolution," *Online Media and Society* 4(4), (2023) 51–73.

[23] Bražinová, I., & Caletková, L. "Digitisation of Sibling and Social Relationships of Vulnerable Children in the Czech Republic: Implications for Digital Social Work," *Child & Family Social Work* 8(3), (2024) 43-56. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13179, accessed on November 7, 2024.

nature and content of these interactions in the digital era. Specifically, it purports to address the following research questions:

1. How does the use of social media platforms impact sibling dynamics?

2. How does social media influence support and build relationships among adolescent siblings?

3. How are sibling relationships maintained in the digital era, particularly among adolescents?

By investigating these questions, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences sibling interactions and contributes to their emotional and social development.

Chapter II

Methodology

Research Design

This study explored the influence of social media on adolescent sibling relationships using a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth insights from participants about their social media interactions and how these impact communication, bonding, and conflict among siblings. A qualitative approach provided a comprehensive understanding of personal experiences and social contexts, allowing the exploration of sibling dynamics in the digital era[24]. This focus on adolescents offers valuable perspectives on how digital platforms shape sibling relationships during a pivotal developmental stage.

Participants

The participants were adolescents ages 13 to 18 from a village within the Quezon City area in the Philippines. They were purposefully selected based on their active use of social media and relevant experiences with sibling interactions. The sample consisted of six participants, chosen to reflect diverse sibling configurations, including varying age differences, and to ensure a broad understanding of sibling dynamics. Only participants who were able

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[24] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.)*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, (2018).

to communicate in the English language were included since one of the researchers could not speak the dialect.

Measures

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method. This approach allowed flexibility and depth, enabling the researchers to explore specific themes while adapting to each participant's unique responses.[25] An interview guide was developed to include open-ended questions addressing participants' social media use, sibling interactions, and the influence of digital platforms on communication, emotional connection, and conflict resolution. This format ensured systematic exploration of key themes while providing opportunities for participants to share additional insights.

Procedures

The study started by obtaining informed consent from both adolescent participants and their parents or guardians, guaranteeing ethical compliance and transparency. Following consent, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, either in person or via an online platform, depending on participant preference and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's permission.

After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. Participants were allowed to review their transcripts for accuracy, enhancing the credibility of the data. Thematic analysis was then applied to identify patterns and themes within the data, providing a thorough understanding of the role of social media in shaping adolescent sibling dynamics.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data[26]. This structured approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of complex and subjective experiences while ensuring methodological rigor. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by continuously re-reading it. Second, initial codes about the data were organized into smaller groups. Third, initial

[25] Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. "Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 72(12), (2016) 2954–2965.

[26] Braun, V. & Clarke, V. "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2), (2006) 77-101.

themes were created based on the codes. Fourth, these themes were reviewed by the researchers themselves and by a research expert who was not included in the study. Fifth, these themes were refined to clarify their relationships and connections, securing a logical and well-integrated thematic structure. Finally, the complete data analysis was written.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the adolescent participants' well-being and rights and ensure a respectful and ethical research process, the following ethical considerations were taken. First, to obtain informed consent, participants and their parents or guardians received clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Second, to maintain confidentiality, personal information was made anonymous, and data were then securely stored. Audio recordings and transcripts were used solely for research purposes, and participant identities were not disclosed in the manuscript and publication report. Third, questions and topics were tailored to the participants' developmental stage to ensure comprehension and accurate responses. Finally, the study followed ethical guidelines for research involving minors.[27]

Chapter III

Results

This study aimed to explore the role of social media in shaping sibling relationships, particularly focusing on adolescent siblings. Through qualitative methods, the research sought to uncover nuanced insights into how digital platforms influence sibling dynamics, promote supportive interactions, and facilitate the maintenance of sibling bonds in the digital era. The study addressed the following research questions: (1) How does using social media platforms impact sibling dynamics? (2) How does social media influence support and build relationships among adolescent siblings? (3) How are sibling relationships maintained in the digital era, particularly among adolescent siblings? The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of both the opportunities and challenges social media presents in fostering sibling connections, highlighting key themes

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[27] American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th ed. Washington DC: American Psychological Association., (2020).

such as emotional support, digital bonding, and the interplay between online and offline interactions.

Research Question 1. How does the use of social media platforms impact sibling dynamics?

Themes	Number of Responded Participants	Responses
Social media as a Connector	6	"*It helps us stay connected and engaged, fostering ongoing support and communication*" (Participant 2, personal communication, November 16, 2024).
Social media as a Memory Keeper and Celebrator	5	"*It helps us remember special occasions by providing a digital record of shared experiences*" (Participant 4, personal communication, November 17, 2024).
Communication and Emotional Support	6	"*Social media fosters a sense of togetherness through quick messages and supportive interactions*" (Participant 5, personal communication, November 17, 2024).
Connection Through Common Interests	4	"*Sharing funny posts or jokes online creates opportunities for connection and helps keep our relationship lively*" (Participant 1, personal communication, November 16, 2024).

The participants' responses revealed the following key themes: *Social Media as a Connector*, *Memory Keeper and Celebrator*, *Communication and Emotional Support*, and *Connection Through Common Interests*. These themes are discussed below, highlighting their impact on sibling dynamics.

Social Media as a Connector. Participants widely acknowledged the role of social media in maintaining communication, especially across geographical distances. Many highlighted the ability to share updates, tag siblings in posts, and stay informed about each other's daily lives. This connection fostered a sense of closeness even when siblings were physically separated due to busy schedules. One participant stated, "It helps us stay connected and engaged, fostering ongoing support and communication" (P2). Social media offers real-time communication;

ensuring siblings remain engaged and involved in each other's lives.[28] This aligns with previous studies, which have shown that social media can bridge relational gaps and foster a sense of community.[29] However, some participants noted that older siblings, who were less proficient with technology, experienced less connection, suggesting that digital literacy may influence the effectiveness of these platforms in fostering sibling bonds.

Social Media as a Memory Keeper and Celebrator: Participants also identified social media as a tool for preserving and celebrating shared memories. Several respondents emphasized how platforms like Instagram and Facebook allowed them to relive special occasions and milestones. As one participant noted, "It helps us remember special occasions by providing a digital record of shared experiences" (P4). However, while social media enhances familial pride, some participants pointed out that not all content was appreciated by every sibling, especially when posts were controversial or too personal.

Communication and Emotional Support: Social media also provided a means for siblings to exchange emotional support through quick messages, comments, and emojis. Participants expressed that platforms allowed them to comfort one another during difficult times or celebrate happy moments. One participant shared, "Social media fosters a sense of togetherness through quick messages and supportive interactions" (P5). However, miscommunication was also reported, such as when posts or comments were misinterpreted as criticism, underscoring the complex nature of online communication within familial contexts.

Connection Through Common Interests: Digital platforms like TikTok, Facebook and Instagram enabled siblings to bond over shared interests such as humor, hobbies, and memes. These informal interactions added vitality to sibling relationships. For example, one participant noted, "Sharing funny posts or jokes online creates opportunities for connection and helps keep our relationship lively" (P1) Participant 1. Despite these positive connections, disagreements occasionally arose when siblings had differing tastes in content.

While social media generally strengthened sibling relationships, some challenges were noted, including misunderstandings, jealousy from comparisons, and privacy concerns. Participants reported that posts with double meanings or involving disliked individuals could

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[28] Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. "The benefits of Facebook friends: Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), (2007). 1143–1168.

[29] Vitak, J., Ellison, N. B., & Steinfield, C. "The ties that bond: Re-examining the relationship between Facebook use and bonding social capital," *Proceedings of the 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, (2011) 1-10.

lead to emotional tension. Additionally, excessive time spent online during in-person family interactions caused feelings of neglect. These findings suggest that while social media can enhance sibling connections, it requires careful navigation to avoid conflicts and balance online and offline engagement.

Research Question 2. How does social media influence support and build relationships among adolescent siblings?

Themes	Number of Responded Participants	Responses
Expression of Care and Encouragement	5	*"Social media makes it easier for siblings to show care, encouragement, and celebrate achievements, especially when face-to-face interaction is not possible"* (Participant 1, personal communication, November 16, 2024).
Strengthening Bonds through Digital Communication	5	*"Even when we can't be together, these tools keep our bond strong and engaged"* (Participant 2, personal communication, November 16, 2024).
Fostering Empathy and Support	4	*"Social media provides insight into my siblings' lives and moods, helping me understand their highs and lows. This understanding allows me to offer support when they need it most"* (Participant 6, personal communication, November 17, 2024).

Social media plays a significant role in fostering care, encouragement, and emotional connection among siblings. Below are the key themes that highlight how social media supports and builds relationships.

Expression of Care and Encouragement: Social media platforms provide siblings with an easy way to express care through likes, comments, and reactions. Participants highlighted that encouragement was often shown through subtle online interactions, such as celebrating achievements and offering support. One participant noted, "Social media makes it easier for siblings to show care, encouragement, and celebrate achievements" (P1). Research supports the idea that social media is a tool for maintaining and

strengthening sibling relationships, even when physical interaction is not possible.[30]

Strengthening Bonds through Digital Communication: For siblings separated by distance, digital communication tools like messaging apps help maintain emotional closeness. Participants noted that social media allowed them to share updates and connect over shared interests, further strengthening their bond. One participant shared, "Even when we cannot be together, these tools keep our bond strong and engaged" (P2). This is consistent with research by Ahn & Shin (2013), which highlights how shared online activities reinforce sibling bonds.

Fostering Empathy and Support: Social media enabled siblings to gain insight into each other's lives and emotions, fostering empathy and understanding. One participant shared, "Social media provides insight into my siblings' lives and moods, helping me understand their highs and lows" (P6). This understanding enabled participants to offer support when needed, reinforcing the emotional bond between siblings.

Research Question 3. How are sibling relationships maintained in the digital era, particularly among adolescent siblings?

Themes	Number of Responded Participants	Responses
Impact of Digital Distractions	5	*"Maintaining a relationship with my sibling digitally feels less personal and can create a sense of distance, as it lacks the emotional depth of face-to-face interaction"* (Participant 3, personal communication, November 16, 2024).
New Forms of Bonding	4	*"While face-to-face interactions may feel more personal, digital contact helps maintain and strengthen our bond"* (Participant 4, personal communication, November 17, 2024).
Balancing Online and Offline Interactions	4	*"While face-to-face interactions provide a deeper sense of connection, digital interactions offer flexibility, especially during busy schedules or physical distance"* (Participant 5, personal communication, November 17, 2024).

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[30] Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. "The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4), (2007) 1143–1168.

Conflict Resolution Through Technology	3	*"Social media helps resolve conflicts by making it easier to apologize and lighten the mood, preventing arguments from escalating"* (Participant 2, personal communication, November 16, 2024).
Shared Learning and Engagement	3	*"Sometimes we spend time together just watching Tik-Tok or funny videos and that's become a new way to bond"* (Participant 1, personal communication, November 16, 2024).

The participants shared a range of insights on how social media impacts sibling relationships in the digital age. Below are the key themes that highlight both the positive and negative influences of social media.

Impact of Digital Distractions: Some participants noted that while social media and technology could enhance online interactions; they sometimes created a sense of disconnection during face-to-face interactions. One participant stated, "Maintaining a relationship with my sibling digitally feels less personal and can create a sense of distance" (P3). This sentiment aligns with Turkle's findings, which suggest that digital distractions can weaken the emotional depth of in-person relationships.[31]

New Forms of Bonding: Digital activities like watching TikTok videos or engaging in online games allowed siblings to bond in new ways. These shared activities fostered collaboration and positive interactions, as one participant noted, "While face-to-face interactions may feel more personal, digital contact helps maintain and strengthen our bond" (P4).

Balancing Online and Offline Interactions: Many participants emphasized the importance of balancing online and offline interactions. While digital tools like video calls help maintain relationships, in-person interactions were seen as essential for deeper emotional connection. One participant shared, "While face-to-face interactions provide a deeper sense of connection, digital interactions offer flexibility" (P5).

Conflict Resolution through Technology: Participants noted that digital platforms provided new ways to resolve conflicts. Messaging apps allowed siblings to communicate more thoughtfully, making it easier to apologize and resolve issues. As one participant put it, "Social media helps resolve conflicts by making it easier to apologize and lighten the mood" (P2).

Shared Learning and Engagement: Siblings also engaged in shared learning and entertainment, such as watching videos or sharing educational

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[31] Turkle, S. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, New York: Penguin Books, (2017).

content, which fostered mutual understanding and empathy. One participant expressed that "Sometimes we spend time together just watching TikTok or funny videos and that's become a new way to bond" (P1).

Chapter IV

Discussion

This research explored the evolving role of social media in shaping sibling relationships, revealing both the benefits and challenges associated with digital communication. The findings underscore the transformative impact of social media in fostering connection, emotional support, and memory-sharing, particularly in contexts where siblings are geographically separated or dealing with busy schedules. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, and messaging apps facilitate ongoing interaction, allowing siblings to celebrate milestones, share experiences, and offer emotional support. Aligning with previous research, such as those by Coyne, Padilla-Walker, and Howard, who found that digital tools enhance sibling bonding by offering continuous opportunities for interaction,[32] and Wang S, Wang Y, and Gaskin, who emphasize the importance of social media in maintaining close sibling ties despite physical distance.[33]

However, while digital platforms provide opportunities for connection, they also introduce potential drawbacks. Misunderstandings, emotional distance, and over-reliance on digital communication can weaken the depth and quality of sibling relationships. These challenges reflect concerns raised by Lee and Chae, who noted the limitations of digital communication in fully replacing face-to-face interaction.[34] Additionally, Morris highlights that while social media can enhance relationships, excessive dependence on these tools may hinder emotional closeness and intimacy.[35]

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[32] Coyne, S. M., Padilla-Walker, L. M., & Howard, E. "Emerging Adulthood and Digital Media: The Role of Technology in Family Relationships," *Family Relations* 69(3), (2020) 614–626.

[33] Wang, S., Wang, Y., & Gaskin, J. "The Role of Empathy in Digital Communication and Sibling Bonding," *Computers in Human Behavior* 92, (2019) 333–340.

[34] Lee, S. J., & Chae, Y. G. "Children's Internet use and parental mediation in a digital age," *Cyber psychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 10(3), (2016) 82-125.

[35] Morris, M. E. "Digital Platforms and Conflict Resolution in Family Relationships," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38(7), (2021) 1903–1919.

The study suggests that the effectiveness of social media in fostering sibling bonds is contingent on its mindful and balanced use. This emphasizes the need for digital literacy, etiquette, and the integration of both online and offline interactions. Encouraging siblings to balance digital communication with face-to-face interactions can help preserve the emotional depth and resilience of their relationships. Future research could explore targeted strategies, such as educational programs on digital literacy, to maximize the benefits of technology while mitigating its potential drawbacks. In sum, fostering a healthy synergy between digital and offline interactions is key to building resilient and adaptive sibling relationships in the digital age.

Key Insights

Social Media as a Connector and Memory Keeper: Social media serves as a vital bridge for siblings who are geographically or emotionally distant. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and messaging apps facilitate both casual interactions and more meaningful exchanges, allowing siblings to stay connected, share memories, and celebrate achievements.

Emotional Support and Shared Interests: Digital platforms provide siblings with a space to express care, encouragement, and empathy. Their shared interests, including hobbies and trending topics, help siblings engage with one another, fostering deeper bonds and strengthening their relationships.

Challenges of Digital Interactions: Despite its many benefits, social media also introduces challenges such as digital distractions during face-to-face interactions, misunderstandings resulting from indirect communication, and emotional distance. These findings highlight the importance of balancing digital and offline interactions to preserve the quality of sibling relationships.

Conflict Resolution and Growth: Social media provides siblings with a less confrontational space to resolve conflicts, express emotions, and reconcile after disagreements. In addition to conflict resolution, digital platforms offer opportunities for shared learning and personal growth, which can deepen sibling bonds.

Conclusion

This study examined the multifaceted role of social media in shaping sibling relationships, particularly among adolescents. The findings underscore both the benefits and challenges associated with digital

platforms in fostering communication, emotional support, and shared experiences. Social media allows siblings to bridge geographical distances, celebrate milestones, and provide real-time emotional support, thereby strengthening their bonds. These digital tools create ongoing opportunities for engagement, facilitating connection through shared interests and offering encouragement during times of need.

Despite these advantages, the study also reveals potential drawbacks of over-reliance on digital interactions. Misunderstandings, emotional distance, and distractions during face-to-face encounters emerged as significant challenges that can undermine the quality of sibling relationships. These findings highlight the importance of balancing online and offline communication to preserve the emotional depth and intimacy that direct, personal engagement offers. While social media provides valuable tools for maintaining connection, it cannot fully replace the richness of in-person interactions.

The core insight of this research is the dual nature of social media as both a facilitator and complicator of sibling relationships in the digital age. By acknowledging this complexity, adolescents, parents, and educators can better navigate the nuances of digital communication and cultivate stronger, more resilient sibling bonds. The study emphasizes the need for mindful and balanced use of technology, ensuring it complements rather than diminishes the quality of offline relationships.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that, when used thoughtfully, social media can significantly enhance sibling relationships by providing continuous opportunities for communication, emotional support, and shared experiences. However, it is essential to recognize and manage the challenges digital interactions present. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, future research should focus on identifying strategies to help adolescents and their families navigate these complexities, ensuring that social media serves as a positive force in strengthening relationships.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited because they are predicated only on six adolescent siblings within a village sample. Additionally, only participants who could communicate in English were included due to one of the researchers' language limitations. Participants may also have been inclined to provide responses that they perceived as socially acceptable or desirable, rather than expressing their true thoughts and feelings about sibling relationships and social media use

because the researcher leading the interviews was a Catholic priest. Addressing these limitations in future related studies can help strengthen the research and further ensure validity and reliability of the findings.

Practical Value of the Paper

Promoting Digital Etiquette and Balance: Educating families, particularly adolescents, on responsible social media use can help mitigate common challenges, such as misunderstandings and digital distractions. Furthermore, encouraging a balance between online and offline interactions will be crucial to maintaining the depth of sibling relationships.

Facilitating Positive Digital Experiences: Parents and educators play a key role in guiding adolescents toward positive digital experiences. They can promote the use of social media to celebrate achievements, share meaningful content, and offer support during difficult times, fostering positivity in sibling relationships.

Leveraging Technology for Growth: Siblings can use digital tools to engage in collaborative activities, shared learning experiences, and meaningful communication, which not only strengthens their relationships but also helps them adapt to modern lifestyles anchored on technology.

Directions for Future Research

Further research could explore the following areas to deepen the understanding of social media's impact on sibling relationships. First, studying the influence of cultural and socio-economic factors on digital sibling interactions. Second, strategies for minimizing negative outcomes, such as emotional distance or misunderstandings, in digital communication can be explored. Third, the role of parental mediation in shaping healthy social media habits among siblings. Finally, longitudinal studies can be conducted to track the evolving nature of sibling relationships in the digital age, examining the long-term effects of digital communication on sibling bonds.