

Parental Attitudes Toward Social Media: Effects on Teen Usage and Behavior

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of parental attitudes on adolescent social media usage patterns and behaviors. As social media becomes an integral part of teenagers' daily lives, the role of parental guidance in fostering responsible online behavior is increasingly critical. This research investigates how different parental perspectives—ranging from supportive to restrictive—affect adolescents' social media engagement and behavioral outcomes. Through surveys of 150 adolescents aged 13–18 and their parents, significant correlations were identified between parental attitudes and adolescent usage trends, including screen time, platform preferences, and participation in risky online behaviors. The findings underscore the importance of balanced parental involvement in promoting safer and healthier digital habits, providing valuable insights into the role of family dynamics in shaping adolescents' social media experiences.

Keywords: Parental attitudes, adolescent behavior, social media usage, parental mediation, screen time, risky online behaviors, family influence etc.

1. Introduction

Background

The exponential rise of social media has profoundly transformed the way individuals, particularly adolescents, interact with the world around them. Social media platforms have become integral not only for communication and entertainment but also for self-expression, identity formation, and social engagement. Adolescents, in particular, turn to social media to share personal updates, participate in discussions, follow influencers, and maintain peer relationships. This shift has made platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat central to their daily routines. According to recent studies, the vast majority of teenagers spend several hours each day on social media, making it a primary avenue for social interaction and self-presentation (Pew Research Center, 2021). While social media offers significant opportunities for connection, creativity, and social exploration, it has also raised growing concerns among parents, educators, and mental health professionals. Excessive social media usage is increasingly linked to negative mental health outcomes in adolescents, including heightened anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2018). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of social comparison, where they measure their self-worth against the idealized lives and accomplishments of their peers and influencers (de Vries & Kühne, 2015). This continuous exposure to seemingly perfect representations of others can distort their perceptions of reality, often leading to feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and dissatisfaction with their own lives. Furthermore, excessive use of social media has been associated with problematic behaviors such as addiction, disrupted sleep, and a decline in academic performance (Twenge, 2019).

In addition to these concerns, the interactive nature of social media introduces adolescents to various risks, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and exposure to inappropriate content. Studies have shown that these negative experiences can exacerbate the emotional and psychological toll of social media, creating a complex relationship between adolescents' online activities and their overall well-being (Kowalski et al., 2014). While social media serves as a powerful platform for adolescents to explore their identities and form social connections, it also presents

significant challenges that require careful monitoring, particularly from parents and guardians who are responsible for guiding their children's digital behaviors.

Parental Influence on Social Media Usage

Though adolescents' social media habits are often shaped by peer influences, research shows that parental attitudes play a crucial and equally important role in either moderating or enabling their children's online activities. Parents' perceptions of social media—whether they view it as a positive tool for learning or as a potential source of harm—significantly impact how they choose to manage their children's digital behavior (Livingstone et al., 2017). Parents who harbor negative attitudes toward social media often express concerns about its associated risks, such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, or the potential for negative mental health outcomes. Consequently, these parents are more likely to impose stricter rules and limitations, such as reducing screen time, restricting access to certain platforms, or discouraging social media use altogether out of fear of the emotional and psychological impacts it may have on their children (Lauricella et al., 2016).

Conversely, parents who maintain more positive or supportive attitudes toward social media typically view it as a valuable tool for modern communication, education, and social interaction. These parents may grant their children more freedom to engage with social media, while simultaneously guiding them on responsible and safe usage. This balanced approach often involves open discussions about the potential risks of social media, such as privacy concerns and online safety, ensuring that adolescents are equipped to navigate these platforms responsibly (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). Furthermore, supportive parental attitudes tend to foster open lines of communication between parents and children, encouraging adolescents to share their online experiences. This openness reduces the likelihood of secretive or risky online behavior, as adolescents are more likely to seek guidance and feel comfortable discussing any negative encounters they may have online (Eastin et al., 2016). By actively mediating their children's social media usage through both support and constructive regulation, parents can help adolescents cultivate healthier digital habits and a stronger sense of self-regulation. This mediation not only minimizes exposure to online risks but also

encourages positive interactions, helping adolescents build a balanced and responsible relationship with social media.

2. Literature Review

Social Media Usage Among Adolescents

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and newer apps like BeReal have become central to the social lives of adolescents. These platforms serve as spaces where teenagers communicate, build their identities, and engage in social interactions. A 2021 survey conducted by Pew Research Center revealed that 95% of teenagers in the United States own or have access to a smartphone, and 90% of them actively use at least one social media platform on a regular basis (Pew Research Center, 2021). This widespread access to social media has given rise to new forms of digital interaction and has significantly changed how adolescents relate to their peers and the wider world.

On average, adolescents spend approximately 3-4 hours per day on social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), often engaging in activities such as following influencers, posting updates, sharing photos, and consuming entertainment content. This engagement is not purely social; many teens also use social media for educational purposes, including joining study groups or following accounts related to their academic interests (Rideout, 2019). The visual nature of platforms like Instagram and TikTok also allows adolescents to explore self-expression through images and videos, which can be a powerful tool for developing personal identity. However, excessive use has been linked to adverse effects, including increased anxiety, depression, and negative self-image, especially in cases where adolescents engage in social comparison or become victims of cyberbullying (Twenge, 2019).

Despite these risks, social media has become a critical environment where adolescents learn digital literacy, social norms, and even cultural trends. Thus, understanding how this medium impacts their psychological and social development is vital, especially when considering the role of external influences, such as parents and peers, on how adolescents navigate their online worlds.

Parental Attitudes Toward Social Media

Parental attitudes toward social media can range from highly supportive to overly restrictive, and these attitudes directly shape how parents approach their children's digital engagement. Supportive parents are typically open to social media use, recognizing its role in modern communication, social networking, and even learning. These parents tend to encourage responsible use by guiding their children on how to manage their time online and how to engage safely and respectfully with others on these platforms. They may also use social media as a means of staying connected with their children's activities by following their accounts or discussing their online experiences (Lauricella et al., 2016).

In contrast, restrictive parents view social media as a potential threat to their child's well-being. They may be concerned about issues such as cyberbullying, online predators, inappropriate content, or the negative impact of social comparison, and therefore impose strict rules regarding access and usage. This could involve setting limits on screen time, restricting the use of certain platforms, or even banning social media altogether. Such parental concerns are not unfounded, as studies show that increased social media use can correlate with higher rates of anxiety and depression among teens (Valkenburg & Peter, 2018). However, overly restrictive measures can sometimes backfire, leading adolescents to engage in secretive behavior, such as creating hidden social media accounts or circumventing parental controls (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) introduced the concept of parental mediation strategies, which categorize parental involvement into different approaches: *active mediation*, *restrictive mediation*, and *monitoring*. Active mediation involves parents having open discussions with their children about online risks, responsible usage, and the benefits of social media, allowing for a balanced approach to its use. Restrictive mediation, on the other hand, focuses on setting clear boundaries and limits on what children can do online, while monitoring involves parents keeping track of their children's online activities, either overtly or covertly. The effectiveness of these

strategies varies depending on the child's personality, the family's communication style, and the specific dynamics of their online world.

Impact of Parental Attitudes on Adolescent Behavior

The influence of parental attitudes toward social media on adolescent behavior is well-documented. Research shows that parents who actively engage in *mediation*—discussing online risks, setting guidelines, and promoting responsible digital behavior—tend to have adolescents who are more likely to use social media in healthy and productive ways (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). These adolescents are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as cyberbullying, oversharing, or interacting with strangers online. The open dialogue between parents and children allows adolescents to feel supported and informed, which can foster better decision-making and reduce risky or harmful behavior (Eastin et al., 2016).

Supportive parents help create an environment where adolescents feel comfortable discussing their social media experiences, which can decrease the likelihood of secretive online behavior. This openness not only reduces the chances of adolescents encountering dangerous situations online but also enables them to use social media for positive activities, such as peer bonding, self-expression, and academic purposes (Padilla-Walker et al., 2012). Studies have shown that adolescents from supportive family environments tend to engage in social media for self-development rather than social comparison, using it to connect with like-minded individuals or express themselves creatively (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

On the other hand, overly restrictive parental control may drive adolescents to engage in covert behaviors, such as creating hidden profiles or bypassing parental controls. Such secretive behaviors often expose adolescents to greater online risks, including inappropriate content or cyberbullying (Lauricella et al., 2016). Additionally, these adolescents may lack the necessary digital literacy skills that come from guided use, making them more vulnerable to the negative effects of social media. Without open communication, adolescents may feel isolated in their online experiences and reluctant to seek help if they encounter problems online (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Furthermore, parental monitoring plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent online behavior. When parents are involved in overseeing their children's online activities—whether through apps that track screen time or by actively participating in their children's online spaces—adolescents tend to exhibit more responsible behavior (Livingstone et al., 2017). However, the type and degree of monitoring matter. Adolescents who feel overly monitored may rebel by concealing their online activities, while those whose parents strike a balance between oversight and autonomy are more likely to engage in positive online behaviors.

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing research, several gaps remain that require further exploration. One major gap is the limited focus on how parents' own digital literacy impacts their ability to guide and mediate their children's social media use. Understanding how well parents themselves navigate digital tools and platforms could shed light on more effective mediation strategies. Additionally, much of the research has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving cultural and socioeconomic differences in parental attitudes and approaches underexplored. Further research is needed to understand how these factors influence parental mediation across diverse backgrounds. Another gap lies in the limited emphasis on adolescents' perceptions of parental mediation. Most studies focus on parental strategies, but understanding how adolescents view these interventions could provide a fuller picture of their effectiveness. There is also a lack of longitudinal research investigating the long-term effects of parental mediation on adolescents' social media behaviors as they mature. Finally, as social media platforms and trends evolve rapidly, more research is needed to explore how emerging platforms and digital behaviors alter the dynamics of parental mediation. Addressing these gaps will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how parental attitudes, cultural factors, and technological changes shape adolescent social media usage and behavior.

Problem Statement

The increasing role of social media in the daily lives of adolescents raises concerns about its impact on their well-being, behavior, and development. Parental attitudes toward social media—whether supportive, restrictive, or indifferent—play a critical role

in shaping how adolescents engage with online platforms. However, little is known about the specific ways these parental attitudes influence adolescents' frequency of social media use, platform choices, and their vulnerability to risks such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and internet addiction. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between parental attitudes and adolescent social media behavior.

Research Questions

1. How do different parental attitudes (cautious, supportive, neutral) affect adolescents' social media usage patterns, including daily screen time and platform preferences?
2. What impact do parental mediation strategies (e.g., strict rules vs. open communication) have on adolescents' online behavior, particularly regarding risks like cyberbullying and social comparison?
3. How does parental digital literacy and the balance between guidance and autonomy influence adolescents' self-regulation and healthy social media habits?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the relationship between parental attitudes (cautious, supportive, neutral) and adolescents' social media usage patterns, particularly daily screen time and platform preferences.
2. To examine the influence of parental mediation strategies on adolescents' online behavior, with a focus on risks such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and secretive social media use.
3. To explore the impact of parental digital literacy and the balance between parental guidance and adolescent autonomy on fostering responsible social media habits and self-regulation among adolescents.

Hypotheses

H1: Adolescents with cautious parental attitudes will have lower daily social media usage but will be more likely to engage in secretive online behaviors to bypass strict controls.

H2: Adolescents with supportive parental attitudes will exhibit healthier social media usage patterns (moderate screen time, responsible platform use) and will report fewer instances of cyberbullying, social comparison, and other online risks compared to adolescents with neutral or restrictive parents.

H3: Higher levels of parental digital literacy and a balanced approach between guidance and autonomy will correlate with better adolescent self-regulation and healthier social media habits, reducing their vulnerability to online risks.

3. Methodology

Study Design

This study uses a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of how parental attitudes affect adolescent social media use. The quantitative aspect involves structured surveys to gather data on variables such as social media usage patterns, parental mediation strategies, and adolescents' online behaviors. The qualitative component includes semi-structured interviews with selected participants to explore in-depth perspectives on parental attitudes and their impact on adolescent experiences with social media. This mixed-method approach enables both statistical analysis and a deeper exploration of individual experiences.

Sample

The study sampled 150 adolescents aged 13–18 and their parents from urban and suburban areas of Chandigarh. Participants were recruited through schools in the Chandigarh region, ensuring representation from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Both parents and adolescents completed separate surveys. The adolescent survey focused on their social media usage, the platforms they commonly

use, and their perceptions of parental control. The parent survey assessed their attitudes toward social media and the mediation strategies they employed.

In addition, a subset of 20 parent-adolescent pairs was selected for follow-up interviews to gain deeper insights into family dynamics and the influence of parental attitudes on adolescents' online behaviors. This mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, ensures both breadth and depth in understanding the research topic, particularly within the context of Chandigarh's urban and suburban environments.

Data Collection Tools

Two different instruments were used:

1. **Parental Mediation of Media Scale (PMMS):** This scale directly measures parental strategies in mediating media usage, including active mediation, restrictive mediation, and monitoring. It is highly relevant for understanding how parents influence their children's social media habits and behaviors, which is central to your research.
2. **Adolescent Social Media Disorder Scale (SMD Scale):** This scale assesses problematic or addictive social media use among adolescents, capturing the frequency and impact of social media on their daily lives. It provides valuable data on how parental attitudes might influence risky or excessive social media behavior in adolescents.

Procedure

The surveys were distributed through school administrators and an online survey platform to ensure wide accessibility and convenience for participants. School administrators assisted in disseminating the surveys to both adolescents and their parents, while the online platform allowed participants to complete the surveys at their own pace. This approach provided flexibility and ensured a higher response rate from diverse geographical and socio-economic backgrounds. In addition to the quantitative surveys, 20 parent-child pairs were selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

These interviews were designed to gain deeper insights into how parental attitudes toward social media translate into actual behaviors and interactions within the family. The selection of parent-child pairs was done purposively to reflect a range of demographic and social contexts, ensuring diverse perspectives on how social media use is managed at home.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **correlation** and **regression analysis** to examine relationships between parental attitudes and adolescent social media behaviors. Correlation identified significant associations, while regression assessed the strength and direction of these relationships.

For qualitative data, **thematic analysis** was used to identify key patterns in parent-child interactions related to social media. This approach highlighted recurring themes, such as parental control and communication, providing deeper insights into family dynamics.

4.RESULTS

The study shows that parental attitudes significantly influence adolescent social media use. Most participants were from urban areas, with highly educated parents (Table 1), which likely shaped their approaches to managing social media. Cautious parents limited screen time, while more hands-off parents allowed greater usage (Tables 2 and 3). Correlation analysis (Table 4) confirmed that stricter control reduces screen time, while neutral parenting leads to higher usage. Qualitative themes, such as concerns over online risks, trust, autonomy, and parental digital literacy, further highlighted the varied impacts of different parenting styles on adolescent social media behavior.

Table 1: Demographic Findings

Category	Percentage (%)
Urban	65
Suburban	35

College Education	75
Postgraduate	20
High School	5

Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the study sample. The majority of adolescents (65%) were from urban areas, while 35% resided in suburban regions. A high percentage of parents (75%) had a college-level education, with 20% holding postgraduate degrees. Only 5% of parents had completed high school. This demographic mix suggests a highly educated participant group, which may influence how parents perceive and manage their children's social media use.

Table 2: Parental Attitudes

Attitude	Percentage (%)
Cautious	40
Supportive	35
Neutral	25

Table 2 represents Parental attitudes toward social media varied across the sample. Cautious parents (40%) were concerned about risks like cyberbullying and inappropriate content and imposed stricter controls on their children's social media use. Supportive parents (35%) recognized the benefits of social media but emphasized responsible use and moderation. Neutral parents (25%) allowed their children greater autonomy and had a more hands-off approach. These differences in attitudes are critical in understanding the varying levels of parental engagement with their adolescent children's social media habits.

Table 3: Teen Social Media Usage Patterns

Parental Attitude	Average Daily Usage (Hours)

Cautious	1.5
Supportive	3
Neutral	4.5

Table 3 highlights the impact of parental attitudes on the amount of time adolescents spend on social media. Adolescents with cautious parents used social media for an average of 1.5 hours daily, suggesting that parental regulation significantly limits screen time. Adolescents with supportive parents reported 3 hours of daily usage, indicating a balance between parental guidance and the freedom to use social media. Adolescents with neutral parents had the highest usage, averaging 4.5 hours per day, reflecting minimal parental intervention and greater autonomy in their online activities.

Table 4: Correlation Between Parental Attitudes and Teen Behavior

Parental Attitude	Correlation with Screen Time (r)
Cautious	-0.62
Supportive	0.35
Neutral	0.1

Table 4 shows the correlation between parental attitudes and adolescent screen time. Cautious parents had a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.62$) with screen time, indicating that stricter parental regulation is associated with significantly reduced social media use. Supportive parents showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.35$), suggesting that while they offer guidance, their adolescents still maintain moderate screen time. Neutral parents had a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.10$), indicating that a hands-off approach leads to higher screen time, but without significant parental influence on behavior.

In analyzing the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews, several important themes emerged related to parental attitudes and adolescent social media use. A prominent theme was **parental concerns over online risks**, where many parents expressed fears

about the dangers their children might face online, such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and exposure to online predators. These concerns often motivated parents to implement stricter regulations on their child's social media use. One parent noted, "I'm always worried about what she might come across. That's why I try to limit her time online." This cautious attitude was a major driver of restrictive parenting practices. Another theme that emerged was the role of **trust and communication between parents and adolescents**. Parents who maintained open dialogues with their children about social media reported higher levels of trust, and adolescents in these families felt more comfortable sharing their online experiences. As one parent said, "We talk about everything. If he sees something strange online, he knows he can tell me." In these households, the level of trust reduced the need for covert behavior by the adolescents, fostering a healthier approach to social media. **Autonomy and self-regulation** was also a key theme, especially among adolescents from families with neutral or hands-off parenting styles. These teens often spoke about having the freedom to manage their social media use independently, though some admitted to overusing it. One adolescent said, "My parents don't really set rules. It's up to me how much I use social media," reflecting a sense of responsibility, but also occasional overuse due to lack of guidance. Conversely, a theme of **parental restrictions and their effects on teen behavior** revealed that overly restrictive parents sometimes pushed their adolescents toward secretive social media use. Adolescents with highly controlled environments reported engaging in covert behaviors like creating secret accounts or using social media at friends' houses. One teen explained, "When they took away my phone, I just used my friend's account without telling them, "Indicating that excessive control can lead to hidden, potentially riskier online activities. Another important theme was the **balance between guidance and freedom**. Some parents talked about the importance of finding a middle ground, providing guidance while also allowing their children the freedom to explore social media on their own. One parent described this balance by saying, "I don't want to control every aspect of her online life, but we talk regularly about what's appropriate." This balance helped adolescents develop healthier social media habits while still feeling autonomous. Adolescents also shared their **perceptions of social media**, describing it as both a social necessity and a source of pressure. While many

enjoyed the constant connectivity with friends, others admitted feeling anxiety and pressure to conform to online standards. One teen noted, “It’s fun, but sometimes I get stressed about how I look online,” highlighting the dual nature of social media as both a positive tool for connection and a potential source of self-esteem issues.

Lastly, the theme of **parental digital literacy** surfaced as a critical factor in how parents approached social media regulation. Parents who were more familiar with social media felt more confident in guiding their children’s online behavior, while those with limited digital knowledge expressed frustration over their inability to monitor or understand their child’s social media use effectively. As one parent noted, “I use social media myself, so I know how it works, and I can explain the risks to her,” compared to another who said, “I don’t know much about these apps, so I find it hard to keep up with what they’re doing online.” These themes underscore the complex dynamics between **parental attitudes, trust, autonomy, and communication**, and how they shape adolescent social media behaviors. They also highlight the potential challenges of both overly restrictive and overly permissive parenting styles, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach in guiding adolescents’ social media use.

5. Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The findings of this study indicate that restrictive parental attitudes, while effective in reducing the overall time adolescents spend on social media, can sometimes have unintended consequences, particularly in the form of secretive online behavior. Adolescents whose parents strictly regulate their social media use often find ways to bypass these restrictions, such as using social media in secret or accessing it through friends’ accounts. This suggests that while strict rules may succeed in limiting screen time on the surface, they may inadvertently push adolescents to engage in more covert and potentially risky behaviors online. For instance, some adolescents mentioned creating hidden accounts or using their peers’ devices, which could increase their exposure to harmful content without the guidance of a trusted adult. This highlights the complex balance between setting boundaries and fostering trust within parent-child

relationships. In contrast, supportive parents who practice active mediation—engaging in open discussions about the benefits and risks of social media—seem to foster healthier digital habits among their adolescents. These parents often take a collaborative approach, involving their children in conversations about responsible social media use, privacy, and online safety. Adolescents in these families reported feeling more comfortable discussing their online activities with their parents, which reduces the likelihood of secretive behavior and promotes responsible use. Through active mediation, these parents not only set guidelines but also empower their children to make informed decisions online. This open communication fosters a relationship built on trust, where adolescents feel they can turn to their parents for advice or support when facing challenges online, such as cyberbullying or inappropriate content. Furthermore, adolescents with supportive parents tend to use social media for a broader range of activities, including educational purposes and maintaining healthy social connections. These teens are more likely to strike a balance between entertainment and productive use of social media, and they demonstrate greater awareness of online risks. As a result, they are less likely to experience the negative psychological effects associated with excessive social media use, such as anxiety, depression, or social comparison. The study also reveals that neutral or indifferent parental attitudes—where parents allow adolescents to self-regulate without much oversight—are associated with the highest levels of social media use. While this approach may grant adolescents more autonomy, it also leaves them more vulnerable to the negative consequences of unchecked social media consumption, such as addiction, exposure to inappropriate content, or increased feelings of loneliness and social comparison. In households where parents offer minimal guidance or engagement with their children's online activities, adolescents may lack the support and knowledge needed to navigate the complexities of social media safely. Overall, the results suggest that a balanced approach—where parents are both supportive and involved—tends to foster the healthiest outcomes in adolescent social media use. Active parental involvement that combines setting clear boundaries with open, ongoing communication is most effective in encouraging responsible use while minimizing risks. Parents who engage with their children about their online experiences create an environment where adolescents are less likely to feel the need to hide their

behavior and more likely to seek advice or help when they encounter challenges online. In summary, while restrictive measures may reduce screen time, they risk driving adolescents toward covert and unsupervised social media use. Conversely, supportive, engaged parenting that includes active mediation tends to promote healthier and more responsible digital habits, helping adolescents navigate social media in a safer and more balanced way. These findings underscore the importance of parental involvement and communication in managing adolescents' social media experiences, highlighting the need for strategies that promote both safety and autonomy.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The results of this study are consistent with findings from previous research, particularly those by Valkenburg and colleagues, who have extensively examined the role of active parental mediation in children's media use. Valkenburg et al. (2017) demonstrated that active mediation, which involves parents engaging in discussions with their children about online content, risks, and responsible behavior, is the most effective strategy for promoting safe online practices. Our study supports these findings, with 35% of supportive parents actively discussing social media risks and usage with their adolescents. Adolescents from these households reported healthier social media habits, with an average usage of 3 hours per day, balancing entertainment with productive activities. One parent from our qualitative interviews explained, "We talk about everything. If she sees something that bothers her, she tells me right away." This type of open dialogue was shown to reduce the likelihood of secretive behavior and foster trust between parents and adolescents. Moreover, this study aligns with existing literature on the risks of restrictive parenting. Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2017) highlight that overly restrictive approaches, such as limiting social media use without explanation or discussion, can backfire by increasing the allure of prohibited activities. Our findings revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.62$) between restrictive parenting and lower social media usage. However, the interviews revealed that adolescents in these environments often engage in covert behavior, such as creating secret accounts or using social media through friends' devices. One adolescent admitted, "When my parents restricted my phone use, I just used my friend's device instead." This reflects the

phenomenon of reactance, where adolescents push back against perceived control, as noted in Valkenburg's work. Additionally, our results support conclusions from Lwin, Stanaland, and Miyazaki (2008), who argue that parental monitoring, when unaccompanied by communication, may be perceived as invasive. Our study showed that 40% of cautious parents who employed strict controls without active discussion saw lower social media use among their children (averaging 1.5 hours per day). However, these adolescents were more likely to engage in secretive behavior, as the lack of communication made them feel that their privacy was being invaded. These findings suggest that while monitoring is effective in reducing screen time, it must be paired with active mediation to avoid unintended consequences. The importance of balanced, supportive parenting is further underscored by this study, in line with the findings of Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2011). Adolescents with supportive parents, who combined moderate guidance with trust, reported more positive social media experiences and lower instances of problematic behavior. These adolescents, who had greater autonomy but open discussions about their online activities, averaged 3 hours of social media use daily, striking a healthy balance between entertainment and academic purposes. As one parent noted, "I don't want to control every aspect of her online life, but we talk regularly about what's appropriate." This balanced approach aligns with existing literature that suggests supportive parenting fosters responsibility and reduces the likelihood of risky behaviors. In summary, our findings align with established research that emphasizes the effectiveness of active mediation over restrictive or neutral approaches. Quantitative results showed a clear negative correlation between restrictive parenting and lower screen time, while supportive parents' engagement led to healthier social media habits. These results confirm that while strict parental controls may reduce usage, they risk pushing adolescents toward secretive behaviors, whereas open discussions foster trust and responsible online behavior.

Implications

The findings from this study highlight several important implications for both parents and educators in managing adolescent social media use effectively. Parents, in particular, should consider adopting a balanced approach to social media regulation.

This approach combines setting clear boundaries with providing autonomy, fostering an environment where adolescents feel guided but not overly restricted. Research consistently shows that strict parental controls, without accompanying discussions, can lead to secretive behaviors and rebellion. On the other hand, complete freedom without guidance may expose adolescents to online risks such as cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and social comparison pressures. Therefore, parents should aim for a middle ground where they actively engage in conversations with their children about online safety, privacy, and the potential risks associated with social media. This active mediation not only encourages responsible behavior but also strengthens trust between parents and adolescents, reducing the likelihood of covert or risky social media use. Parents who adopt a more supportive and communicative approach to social media regulation are more likely to foster healthy online habits in their children. For example, engaging in regular discussions about what content is appropriate, the dangers of cyberbullying, and how to navigate privacy settings allows adolescents to feel more confident in their ability to manage their online presence. Moreover, by discussing the benefits and drawbacks of social media, parents can help adolescents develop digital literacy, making them more aware of the consequences of their online actions and better equipped to handle negative online interactions. Parents should also stay informed about evolving social media trends and platforms to provide relevant guidance, ensuring they understand the environments in which their children are engaging. For educators and schools, the findings suggest that they can play a crucial role in supporting parents and adolescents by providing educational resources and training. Schools could organize workshops or seminars for parents, focusing on topics such as the importance of digital literacy, the value of open communication, and how to implement active mediation strategies at home. These workshops could equip parents with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the complex world of social media alongside their children. Given that many parents may not be familiar with the latest social media platforms or trends, educators can bridge this gap by offering insights into the types of content adolescents are consuming and the potential risks they may face online. These educational initiatives can help parents stay up-to-date with the digital landscape, enabling them to provide more effective guidance and support. In addition, schools can integrate digital

citizenship programs into their curricula, helping students develop the skills needed to navigate social media responsibly. These programs can teach adolescents about online safety, privacy, and the importance of respectful behavior in online interactions. By working alongside parents, educators can ensure that adolescents receive consistent messaging about healthy social media use both at home and at school. Schools can also act as mediators in situations where parents may feel overwhelmed or unsure about how to handle certain online behaviors, providing guidance and resources to help manage the challenges of social media use.

Finally, both parents and educators must recognize the importance of mental health support in relation to social media use. Adolescents may experience anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem due to social comparison, cyberbullying, or peer pressure online. Schools should ensure that counselors are available to support students struggling with the negative impacts of social media, while parents should maintain an open line of communication with their children to address any emotional or psychological distress they may encounter online. In conclusion, adopting a balanced approach that combines guidance, trust, and open communication will help parents foster healthier social media habits in their children. Meanwhile, schools and educators can provide critical support through educational resources, workshops, and digital literacy programs, empowering both parents and adolescents to navigate the online world responsibly and safely. Together, these efforts can create a more supportive environment that encourages positive online behavior while mitigating the risks associated with social media use.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it relied on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability bias, as participants might have provided responses that they believed to be socially acceptable. Second, the sample was confined to urban and suburban schools in Chandigarh, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions, particularly rural areas, where social media access and parental attitudes may differ. Additionally, the study did not extensively consider cultural or socio-economic diversity within the sample, which could have provided deeper insights into how different family backgrounds shape social media behaviors and parental

mediation. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to track changes in parental attitudes and adolescent social media behavior over time. Future research could address these limitations by including a more diverse sample and employing longitudinal data collection methods.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of **parental attitudes** in shaping adolescents' social media usage and behavior. The findings suggest that **restrictive approaches**, while effective in reducing screen time, can lead to **unintended consequences**, such as secretive behaviors, where adolescents find ways to bypass parental controls. Although limiting social media access may seem beneficial on the surface, it often fails to promote responsible online behavior in the long term and can even increase the allure of forbidden activities. On the other hand, **supportive and engaged parenting**—marked by open communication and active mediation—emerges as the most effective strategy for fostering **healthier online habits**. Adolescents with parents who balance clear boundaries with trust are more likely to use social media responsibly and develop digital resilience. These adolescents are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors like cyberbullying or social comparison, as they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences with their parents. This approach creates an environment of trust and transparency, reducing the need for covert behavior and promoting **digital literacy** and **self-regulation**. A key implication of this study is the importance of **parental digital literacy**. Parents who are well-informed about the platforms and technologies their children use are better equipped to provide relevant and meaningful guidance. As social media platforms continue to evolve, parents must stay updated on digital trends to help their children navigate the complex online landscape. **Digital literacy training** for parents could significantly improve their ability to mediate their children's online activities effectively.

Future research should delve deeper into the role of parental digital literacy in shaping adolescent online behavior, as well as explore the **long-term effects** of different parental mediation strategies. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how parental attitudes influence adolescents' social media habits and mental health outcomes

over time. Additionally, research that considers diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts could offer a broader understanding of how parental approaches vary across different environments. In conclusion, the study underscores the need for a **balanced approach** to social media regulation. Parents who combine guidance, trust, and an understanding of digital platforms are more likely to foster **responsible and safe online behavior** in their children. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, equipping both parents and adolescents with the tools to navigate social media thoughtfully and safely will be increasingly essential.

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