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Parents' Perspectives on the Consequences of Cyberspace for Family Communication Patterns: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

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Since the consequences of cyberspace span a wide range of domains, from society to family and individual life, the present study aimed to explore parents' perspectives on how cyberspace affects family communication patterns. This qualitative study was conducted in the fall and winter of 2025–2026 using a content analysis approach with latent content analysis. The population consisted of eight Iranian parents with at least two children. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using semi-structured interviews until data saturation was achieved. Analysis of the data identified six main categories, including disruption of relationships among family members, changes in family values, distortion of reality in family relationships, parenting challenges, increased behavioral maladjustment within the family, and changes in family cultural patterns. Since these findings were derived directly from interviews with Iranian parents, the results provided a valuable foundation for understanding existing cultural gaps regarding the consequences of cyberspace for family communication patterns. Furthermore, the findings may address many family relationship problems, particularly those involving parents and children, by informing strategies for the effective management of cyberspace use in families.

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Introduction

The expansion of cyberspace and social networks in recent years has changed the way people interact and communicate and has had significant consequences for family relationships. This space, while providing opportunities for communication and access to information, can create challenges for the family by changing social interaction patterns, family values, and roles (Esmaeili et al., 2022; Marbun & Nasution, 2024). In the meantime, the family communication pattern is of particular importance because the quality of family relationships, the exchange of thoughts and feelings, and the way interactions are formed between family members are largely influenced by their communication patterns. According to the theory of family communication patterns, family relationships are formed in the two main dimensions of conversational orientation and conformity orientation. Conversational orientation emphasizes the free exchange of thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and conformity orientation emphasizes coordination, agreement, and acceptance of common values (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).Previous research has also shown that the spread of communication technologies can change family communication patterns and, in some cases, reduce family interactions and weaken relationships between members (Dalimunthe et al., 2020; Tadpatrikar et al., 2021). More recent studies have emphasized the role of social media in changing privacy, cohesion, and the quality of family relationships and creating intergenerational conflicts (Ben Lahbib et al., 2025; Amirudin et al., 2025). Moreover, among Iranian users, greater use and dependence on social networks has been associated with weakening family ties and reducing the quality of emotional communication (Tabatabaei et al., 2024). However, the perspective of Iranian parents, as active and influential family members, on the consequences of cyberspace for family communication patterns has received less attention. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the views of Iranian parents about the consequences of cyberspace for family communication patterns. It sought to answer the following question: What are the views of parents about the consequences of cyberspace for the family communication pattern?

Methods

The present study was conducted with an inductive qualitative approach using latent content analysis. Latent content analysis is used to extract meaning and make valid and repeatable inferences from texts and interviews (Krippendorff, 2004). Participants included eight Iranian parents (i.e., four men and four women) with an age range of 34 to 52 years and a mean age of 41.5 years. They were selected through purposive sampling in the fall and winter of 2025–2026. Participants had at least two children over 10 years old, at least a high school diploma, and consent to participate in the study. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews by a counseling specialist, and interviews continued until data saturation was reached. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and were transcribed. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection process. To increase the reliability of the findings, validity, consistency, transferability, and verifiability were considered; the data classification was reviewed and modified by receiving feedback from experts (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Finally, after removing similar and repetitive codes, 255 initial codes, 12 subcategories, and six main categories were extracted.

Findings

The mean duration of the interviews was 37 minutes, and the range was about 30 to 45 minutes. Data analysis of the eight interviews revealed 255 initial codes, 12 subcategories, and six main categories for the final theme of "the consequences of cyberspace for family communication patterns." The first category was disruption of relationships among family members, which included family breakdown and reduced emotional ties, as well as feelings of loneliness and isolation among family members. From the parents' perspective, extensive use of cyberspace could lead to reduced face-to-face conversations, fewer family gatherings, and increased emotional distance between members. The second category was changes in family values, which included the weakening of religious beliefs as well as filial piety and the weakening of parental authority. Parents believed that continuous exposure to cyberspace content could affect the shared values and norms of the family and diminish the status of some traditional and religious values. The third category was the distortion of reality in family relationships, which included the formation of unreasonable expectations in relationships between family members and illusory comparisons within the family. According to the participants, the selective and unrealistic display of life and relationships in cyberspace can provide the basis for comparing family members with others, creating unrealistic expectations, and feeling dissatisfaction with

the current situation. The fourth category was parenting challenges, which included the two subcategories of premature puberty and inappropriate development of children, and changes in the upbringing and lifestyle of family members. Parents mentioned changes in upbringing, reduced effective control, and children's influence on existing patterns in cyberspace as important challenges. The fifth category was the increased behavioral maladjustment within the family, which included family members' dependence and addiction to cyberspace, aggressive behaviors, and family violence. According to the participants' perspective, excessive use of cyberspace can be associated with boredom, decreased tolerance, increased tension, aggression, and ultimately disruption in the quality of family interactions. The sixth category was changes in family cultural patterns, which were revealed through inappropriate modeling of cyberspace characters and patterns and changes in family roles. Parents stated that in some cases, children choose cyberspace characters as role models; this can create changes in role-playing and transmitting family values and norms. In sum, the findings showed that from the parents' perspective, the consequences of cyberspace use are not only limited to a decrease in direct interactions but also include the emotional, value, educational, behavioral, and cultural dimensions of family relationships.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the views of Iranian parents about the consequences of cyberspace for family communication patterns. The findings revealed six main categories, including disruption of relationships among family members, changes in family values, distortion of reality in family relationships, parenting challenges, increased behavioral maladjustment within the family, and changes in family cultural patterns. The finding concerning the disruption of relationships among family members is consistent with the results of studies that emphasize the reduction of face-to-face interactions and the weakening of the quality of family relationships following the extensive use of social media (e.g., Indah et al., 2023; Marbun & Nasution, 2024; Nobakht et al., 2026). The change in family values is also consistent with the findings of Anisti et al. (2023) and Ben Lahbib et al. (2025), who have emphasized the role of cyberspace in redefining family values and norms. Parenting challenges can also be explained by the role of new social environments in the process of children's growth and socialization; a topic that is consistent with the ecological perspective and the findings of Su et al. (2025) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, changes in family cultural patterns can be explained within the framework of social learning theory and the expansion of modeling resources beyond the family (Bandura, 1977).

Overall, the findings showed that from the perspectives of parents, cyberspace use can affect the family's communication pattern at various emotional, value, educational, behavioral, and cultural levels. Accordingly, eliminating cyberspace does not seem to be an appropriate solution, and moving towards its conscious management is necessary. Teaching media literacy to parents and children, creating an atmosphere of trust and dialogue, setting rules for using cyberspace with the participation of family members, strengthening joint activities, and allocating sufficient time for family interaction and recreation can be effective in reducing undesirable consequences. It is also suggested that future research examine the perspectives of children and professionals to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the consequences of cyberspace for family relationships.

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Conflict of interest

According to the authors, this study had no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used at any stage of the preparation, writing, editing, analysis, or translation of this manuscript.

Ethical Approval

The authors declare that All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.

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