


Chapter 1

A Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Technology–Mediated Communication on Parent–Child Intimacy and Conflict

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of digital technologies has reshaped family interaction, creating a dual potential for “virtual closeness” and “digital distance.” This chapter analyzes how technology mediates family life, fostering connection yet risking emotional withdrawal. Guided by Attachment and Social Presence Theories, it examines tools like video calls, messaging apps, co-parenting platforms, and monitoring software. These can sustain bonds across distances but also introduce challenges like “technoference,” parental “phubbing,” and uneven closeness. The analysis reveals that

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outcomes hinge not on the technology itself, but on its application. Positive results are tied to authoritative parenting and open communication. Negative consequences, such as child anxiety, attachment insecurity, and conflict, are linked to parental distraction and intrusive monitoring. It concludes with a conceptual model illustrating how digital tools and attachment behaviors interact to affect family satisfaction, offering practical recommendations and future research directions for nurturing strong family bonds.

INTRODUCTION

Social connection is a cornerstone of human well-being, yet rapid technological change has profoundly transformed how families sustain emotional closeness and navigate physical separation. Decades of research have consistently shown that social isolation is linked to adverse health outcomes, including poor physical health (Shankar et al., 2017), increased mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015), diminished well-being (Golden et al., 2009), and heightened loneliness (Burholt et al., 2017). Loneliness itself has been associated with mortality (Holwerda et al., 2014), cognitive decline and dementia (Holwerda et al., 2014), and reduced functional capacity (Shankar et al., 2017). Early sociological studies suggested that structural transformations in family life and increasing population mobility heightened risks of isolation, particularly among older adults (Hareven, 2018). The World Health Organization (2015) has also emphasized that global trends such as declining fertility rates, shrinking family sizes, and transnational migration are likely to exacerbate social isolation worldwide.

Within this context, technology-mediated communication has emerged as both a solution and a source of tension. On one hand, digital tools from video calls to instant messaging are celebrated for bridging geographical distances and preserving kinship ties (Burholt et al., 2020). Indeed, the technological revolution has been described as “the death of distance” (Cairncross, 2002) and “the end of geography” (Couclelis, 1996). On the other hand, some evidence suggests that technology may inadvertently displace face-to-face interaction, weaken social networks, and intensify isolation (Kraut et al., 1998). This divide between utopian promises of connection and dystopian fears of disconnection remains unresolved, particularly within the intimate sphere of family life. Few studies have systematically explored how digital communication affects families’ everyday emotional experiences, attachment patterns, and sense of presence.

Social relations are commonly evaluated through the quantity and quality of meaningful social contacts or network size, with low levels indicating social isolation (Lubben, 2017). For geographically dispersed families, sustaining in-person

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