



# Discussion on Adolescents' Online Social Networking and the Relationship with Their Parents

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**Abstract:** With the development of the Internet and the popularity of smart electronics, online communication has become an important way for teenagers to communicate. When they use electronic devices to communicate with their friends, what is the attitude of their parents? Taking this question as a starting point, and through extensive questionnaires and one-on-one interviews, the author makes an in-depth investigation of the two generations' different views on network communication, and analyzes the root causes of such differences. By combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, the paper attempts to discuss how the perceptions of the two generations collide and converge, bringing fresh first-hand information and ideas to the research in this field.

**Key words:** social networking; adolescence; communication; family gap

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As the way teenagers communicate today is very different from that in previous decades, most of their communication is online rather than offline. In China, parental control over their children's electronic devices has become an important factor causing communication gaps and conflicts. To distinguish between parents and teenagers, the author used two questionnaires, which were designed and given to the subjects based on a similar pattern. In general, these questions are the investigation of basic information in the online network and some specific subjective choices. For the interviews, the interviewees chose from three standpoints and attitudes: supportive, indifferent, and opposed. The overall result is worth considering from three different degrees, three different standpoints, three different practices. The speeches given by the parents and adolescents are unpredictable. For parents, the way they control online social networking may be too extreme and hard to understand. The correctness of these matters remains to be examined.

## 1. Literature Review

The topics involved in psychology have been studied all the time. There is much existing literature on online social networking, which mainly discusses the effects on many other areas: society, offline communication, and education.

The article *The Influence of Teenagers' Online Game Use on Their Peer Relationship* investigated the data on the time length of online games and social value of online games among middle school students by questionnaire method. It was concluded that there was a significant negative correlation between playtime on weekdays and peer relationship, and weekend playtime has a significant positive correlation with social value. In contrast, there is a significant positive correlation between social values and peer relations. Although games have the function of networking, it still does not fully

serve as a social platform since its primary purpose is for entertaining.

The author collected and collated information about different online social platforms and their uses from the article *The Future of Children: Online Communication and Adolescent Relationships*, which focuses on ways for teenagers to reinforce relationships with their peers, the effect of the online information, and the educational impact. While our research mainly focuses on the influence of social networking on the relationship between teenagers and their parents and predicts how the function of online social networking will improve.

Except for the two examples above, there are many other papers about the influence of the internet on adolescents. In the article *"Embodied Media" and "The Passing of Childhood": The Aging Spread of Mobile Games*, the author talked about the possible results of playing online games. In the school survey, a typical game, "Honor of Kings," can be addictive and harmful to adolescents. In another article, *Minors' Internet "Mediated" Social Communication and Self-Expression*, the authors talked about minors' social interaction, self-expression, content, frequency based on "Chinese Minors Internet Use Survey" data. The focus of this article is to find the online mode. Overall, the first one is about gaming, different from online communication. The second one is about the online social phenomenon, which does not discuss relationships.

## 2. Online Questionnaire Survey

### 2.1 Questions of the online questionnaires

The questions for parents and teenagers are displayed in the graph below(see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Online questionnaire questions

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Concrete question</b>
Basic question (parents)	Age, Academic level, Gender
Basic question (teenagers)	Age, Academic level, Gender
Opinion question (parents)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Children's communication hour</li> <li>2. Children's communication objects</li> <li>3. Closer or more distant to their offline friends as a result of online communication</li> <li>4. Whether online communication improves the children's grades of studying (why?)</li> <li>5. Whether teenagers are willing to share the communication contents and objects</li> <li>6. Whether online communication influences the children's values</li> <li>7. Closer or more distant between children and their parents as a result of online communication</li> <li>8. Whether have done something to influence children's online communication</li> <li>9. How to improve the current pattern of online communication</li> <li>10. Whether children have a correct cognition to online communication</li> </ol>

Classification	Concrete question
Opinion question (teenagers)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communication hour</li> <li>2. Preference between online &amp; offline communication</li> <li>3. Communication objects</li> <li>4. Whether online communication improves the grades of studying (why?)</li> <li>5. Whether parents support online communication</li> <li>6. Whether willing to share the communication contents and objects</li> <li>7. Closer or more distant between children and their parents as a result of online communication</li> </ol>

## 2.2 The difference and similarity between teenagers' and parents' answers

The first question is the time length of online social networking of teenagers. In the 110 parents' choices, about half of the parents objectively think their children communicate online less than an hour, while about 28% of teenagers subjectively are more than 4 hours. The parents may think they have controlled the usage of electronics while their children are using it furtively. If parents find the truth, this could lead to distrust.

The second question is the communication objects of social networking. On the option of "there are both acquaintances and strangers, but there are more strangers", about 13% of teenagers choose this option, while only about 1% of parents think their children do. It also indicates that teenagers could hide the truth about social networking from their parents. The two questions above can be seen as a symbol of the rising privacy awareness of modern adolescents. A boundary line between parents and children has gradually formed instead of a completely transparent social environment.

The third question is whether online social networking affects teenagers' study grades. About 35% of parents think online social networking negatively impacts their children's grades, while only 17% of teenagers think so. It shows that parents are more inclined to blame their children for using electronic device.

Comparing the two questionnaires, some questions would have similar answers. The question is whether teenagers are willing to share the concrete content of online social networking with their parents. There is no significant difference between parents and teenagers. The data of willing and unwilling are 60% - 25% & 56% - 31%. Since there are more requirements for privacy, my original thought was that the unwilling option would be higher, but the result is opposite to my prediction.

## 3. Offline Interviews

### 3.1 Basic questions to interviewees

The interviews with specific families that hold different online communication attitudes can show more concrete and detailed information than questionnaires. The author conducted three group interviews. Each group consists of a teenager and a parent. They hold three different attitudes: support, indifference and non support. The following are the main questions of the interviews.

Parents:

(Basic information: age, education background, occupation, child's age, child's school, grade, department)

1. When does a child get his or her first phone or computer? Purpose?
2. Do you think kids have friends? Online and offline? Is the number of friends in the appropriate range for you?
3. How much time do you think kids spend socializing online? How much time do children spend interacting with

their friends? Online/offline?

4. Is there enough time for communication (Enough to keep a good friendship)?
5. Do you know who your child socializes with online and what topics they are interested in online?
6. Are you actively asking your child about this?
7. How much time do you spend socializing online?
8. What do you think is the difference between parents and teenagers socializing online?
9. Do you support your child to socialize online? Why support or not support?
10. What was the other parent's attitude?
11. Have you discussed online social networking with your children? Were the results positive or negative?
12. What do you think is the future of online social networking? Can its influence reduce the contradiction between

the two sides?

Teenagers:

(Basic information: age, school information)

1. How much time do you spend socializing online? Do you think that's enough time?
2. How much social time do you personally think is appropriate?
3. How do you meet people you socialize with online? How do you meet online friends?
4. What are the components of your daily interactions with your chat partner? (Not demanding)
5. Do you have an open relationship with your parents online? (If so, are you willing to communicate with your parents about the specific content and target of online communication?) Why is that?
6. Do you and your parents not understand each other because of the age gap when it comes to online social interaction?
7. Do you and your parents have trouble socializing online? Why is that?
8. Have you encountered anything that makes you happy/unhappy online? Can you share the details?
9. If bad, what is the cause of this kind of event? Did you seek help from others to overcome it?
10. Do you read bad information while socializing online? (If yes, what do you think of this phenomenon?)
11. Do you think online networking has had a positive or negative impact on you?
12. Do you know how much time your parents socialize online? What do you think is the difference between adults and teens socializing online?
13. What do you think is the future of online social networking? Can its influence reduce the contradiction between the two sides?
14. Do you think online networking has affected your grades? The reason?
15. Is it addictive without parental control?
16. Has online socializing affected your outlook on life?
17. What are your main goals for online networking?

### 3.2 Personal problems that interviewee experienced

First, the possibility of being isolated without social platforms. Teenagers from primary school to university need a platform for social communication. However, the daughter of an unsupported family have experienced lives without social media. Consequently, she was isolated from the social circle. In the interview with her mother, she explained the reason. She thought that her daughter needed to pay all her attention to education rather than useless social communication.

The second problem is the risk of online fraud. For teenagers, they may be tempted due to the superficial benefits. A clear example of the sufferer is the daughter in a family with unsupported attitude. At the age of ten, she received a message from a stranger, who promised to give her back three times as much money if she transferred some money to him. The daughter borrowed some money from her friends and transferred to the stranger. Not until the third transfer, her mother found this secret after checking her phone. This event frightened the mother and caused a stricter check on the daughter's phone. As a result, the girl is further isolated from the outside world.

### 3.3 The general problems within the online networking

In the first place, there are risks of exposure to an individual's private information. Three parents all raised their opinions. The primary reason is that in this world, a combination of virtuality and reality, hackers can easily detect online information. Except for viruses that originally existed online, teenagers may send their privacy to strangers online.

Another problem is that parents may worry about the rebound phenomenon caused by long-term constraints. Much previous research states that it would have negative effects to compulsively control teenagers using electronics. Since parents may restrict the phone use time of teenagers, when teenagers can use the phone, they may be more addicted to the internet than usual. In the family with unsupported attitude, when the daughter received her first phone, she started to chat with others and play video games endlessly, which led to a fall in her grade.

## 4. Conclusion

Though the internet aims at improving humans' living standards and shortening the distance between people, a gap between the previous generation and teenagers would exist, including the differences of the viewpoints for the internet information and itself. To a large extent, teenagers think about the internet more positively as they were born in this era and naturally adapted to this lifestyle. Oppositely, many parents still cannot accept the new communication and automatically think their children would be addicted to the internet or online communication.

As a matter of fact, the reflection of the interview shows that whether the relationship between parents and children would be strengthened depends on the attitudes and the ways of using the internet. Instead of controlling their children, guidance is a better choice for parents. Besides, the internet users and developers should consider how to alleviate the negative effects of the internet, improve the internet environment and ensure security. Especially for those immature teenagers, they need to be protected from unacceptable information. Overall, the research aims at observing the influences of electronics and internet communication on the parent-child relationship through online questionnaires and interviews. In this study, parent-child research is a fixed topic, while the peer relationship seems to be more important for teenagers. But it's even more complicated than the parent-child relationship. Therefore, it becomes a challenging topic for future research.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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