SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS AFFECT ON ADOLESCENT COMMUNICATION SKILLS WITHIN FAMILIES

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We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

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Abstract

It appears that in today’s society someone may be lead on to believe that the Internet has begun to take over direct communication skills within families. Parents in this day in age have to continuously make every attempt, in order to maintain an open line of communication with adolescents in their family. However, with social media on the rise with adolescents, parents may have a challenge on their hands. Today is the age of technology, and 85% of teens between the ages 12-17 engage at least some form of electronic personal communication, which includes text messaging, sending email or instant messages, or posting comments on social networking sites (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & MacGill, 2007a). This study will also go into detail of how and why teens choose to use social media as an outlet; as well as what parents can do to maintain an increasing level of communication with their teens. This research study poses the notion to possibly suggest if social media is having an affect on adolescent communication skills within families. In order to justify and provide qualitative evidence of communication possibly being affected between adolescent communication and their families a focus group was held; and the information from this study is provided.
Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION
  Importance of the Study
  Organization of Remaining Chapters

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
  Theoretical Basis
  The Literature
    Uses and Gratifications Theory
    Social Media and the Millennials
    Teenage Social Networking and Its Affects in the Home
    The Pros and Cons of Social Media

CHAPTER III: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY
  Scope of the Study
  Scope of Methodology
    Participants
    Instruments
    Process and Procedures
    Ethical Considerations

CHAPTER IV: THE STUDY
  Introduction
  Results of the Study
  Discussion

CHAPTER V: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS
  Limitations of the Study
  Further Study Recommendations
  Conclusion

APPENDICES
  Appendix A: Consent to participate in focus group
  Appendix B: Qualitative Questionnaire

REFERENCES
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Study

Social media and adolescents have become a major topic in today’s society or there may be a possibility that communication skills amongst teenagers may begin to diminish. Adolescents have now been given the tools and technology to maintain their lives without speaking a word to someone face-to-face. In contrast this may have a negative effect on their communication skills within their family life. Parents have to learn how to monitor their teen’s cell phone use to ensure no dangers can arise. Teens not only can use their cell phones for texting or logging on to social media networking sites; but teens also have the ability to use their phone to take and send picture messages to others. A study shows that, 20% of teens have claimed to have electronically sent or posted online nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves (Adams, 2010). The concerning part about knowing your adolescent is sending and receiving photos from others is that as a parent, do you really know what photos are being sent.

Thanks to social media networks like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, teenagers can simply log on to these sites and communicate with their friends in a matter of seconds. This is where the Uses and Gratification Theory comes into play. Adolescents constantly feel the need the need to stay active on these social media networking sites. Twitter for example, is a social networking site in which in 2009 8% of all teens used Twitter to constantly stay in communication with others (Purcell, 2010). Thus, this constant need and desire to stay connected with others is a simple example of the gratification part of the Uses and Gratification Theory. Along with the Uses and Gratification theory, the Millennials Generation is also considered to be an important
focus when discussing the importance of this study. This thesis study is extremely important due to the fact that in order to maintain a healthy communication relationship between an adolescent and their family when social media exist; one has to know why their teenager is possibly choosing social media over family time communication.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This project is consists of a total of five chapters. Chapter two provides reviews of literature pertaining to this particular thesis topic, as well as a theoretical basis. Chapter two also presents pros and cons of social media. The next chapter expresses the scope and methodology of the study, which were used to collect data and provide the processes and procedures. Chapter four is the actual study section of the project. This chapter will discuss the results of the study. The final chapter will go into details of the limitation of the study, further recommendations, and presents a conclusion.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Basis

In this day and age, social media has the potential to become the primary means of communication within the adolescent community. However, the use of social media and its affect on adolescents has the possibility to have a negative impact on adolescent communication skills. Popular social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter have become mainstream methods for communication across the board as it has become well integrated into our lives. It is seen in advertising, education and politics and will continue to expand into other institutions in years to come.

Adolescents make up 93% of the population that use the Internet in some way, shape, or form (Lenhart et al., 2007b). With this percentage at a high rate one has to think if extensive Internet usage will have an effect on the communication skills on adolescents. Teenagers currently surf the web for many other things besides catching up the latest gossip. According to Pew Research Center (2009), teenagers currently use the Internet for a multitude of things such as:

- 97% of teens play video games
- 81% go to websites about movies, TV shows, music groups or sports stars
- 65% use online social networking sites
- 63% go online to get news or information about current events or politics
- 57% have watched a video on sites like YouTube
- 18% have visited chat rooms
- 11% have a website
These percentages clearly show that adolescents spend a vast amount of time on the Internet searching or communication for a host of different things to satisfy their needs.

**The Literature**

The review of the literature examines the uses and gratification theory as it provides another possible approach to how teens are approaching their decisions to utilize Internet to access social media websites. Additionally the literature further looks into how this philosophical approach translates into the use of social media within the home, the negative and positive impacts of teens’ use of the Internet and social networking and lastly how the Millennials generation has been affected by social media and its affect on adolescents.

**Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The uses and gratifications theory is explained as the gratifications that attracts and holds audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs. (Ruggerio, 2000). Simply stated the theory explains what media people choose and how to decide to use it. Adolescent teens make a very conscious choice to use the Internet to access social media networking websites as a dominant platform in their lives to communicate. The uses and gratification theory and the assumptions explained provide the framework around why teens make the decision making social media their preferred method of communication.

This theory is broken down into five basic assumptions explained by Elihu Katz. The first assumption being that “…the audience is conceived of as active” (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1973). This idea focuses around the assumption that the viewers are goal oriented and have some control over what they consume. (Rossi, 2002) Through this
attempt to achieve their goals, social media allows teens to stay connected with friends and family providing them the opportunity to participate in community events, develop and share creativity with others, and creating one’s own individual identity and unique social skills (O’Keefe & Clarke Pearson, 2012).

The second assumption insists that the mass communication process much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member. This fosters the idea that teens use the media to their advantage and determine just how much they want to absorb and how much they will allow it to influence their decisions (Rossi, 2002). In this process teens decide how they want to communicate with others and what they want to communicate.

The third and most important assumption is the media competes with other sources of need satisfaction (Katz et al., 1973). Possibly the best competitor to social media is that of face-to-face communication; what most parents and adults struggle with regarding communication with teens today. Adolescents that use the Internet to gain some type of gratification may ultimately lack that same gratification from communicating with their own family. Questions to consider in this case are if teens were not getting gratification from the Internet, would teens gain gratification by communicating face-to-face with their family? Non-media related sources such as parents, teachers and peers must then create a need for itself to be a source of “gratification” yet providing a balance between themselves and social media (Rossi, 2002). Furthermore, parents do find it difficult to connect with their kids because of the technical skill gap they experience with a younger tech savvy generation. This often creates the disconnect with how parents and their kids participate and connect in an
online world (O’Keeffe et al., 2012). On the other hand, social media has also been
proven to bond families. Much of new social media engagement among teens takes place
within the home. Parents, siblings and other family members are often found using social
media and other media outlets while hanging out at home. It is a way for parents to stay
connected or involved, keep abreast of, and even participate in their kids’ interests (Ito,
2002).

The fourth assumption that is discussed is that many goals of mass media use can be
derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves. People are
sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in particular cases,
or at least to recognize them when confronted with them in an intelligible and familiar
verbal formulation (Katz et al., 1973). Social media can help in foster of one’s individual
identity and unique social skills (O’Keeffe et al., 2012, p 801). When adolescents create
profiles they are able to create or rather recreate themselves as they come into their own
self-awareness. They are able to express their interests and intentions in whatever they
choose. Profiles created on websites such as MySpace are constructed for teens’ friends
and peers to view. Teens may present a different identity in their online world that may
not correspond with who they are in the offline world however their primary friends may
still remain in the offline world. Whether online or offline, teens are still inclined to
present an identity that will be accepted by their peers (Boyd, 2008).

The final assumption states that value judgments about the cultural significance of
mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on
their own terms (Katz et al., 1973). Only the audience can determine the value of media
content and basically make a choice on what media they will use and how they will use it.
The value that teens place on social media is high as they see it as simple way to stay in communication with friends. Teens are looking for ways to be cool with their friends yet acceptable to their parents and it is often not the case. Parents have hopes that their children value the same values they grew up with however teenagers struggle to stay in the “in crowd” using methods and values that contradict their parents (Boyd, 2008).

Social Media and the Millennials

The impact of social media on the Millennial Generation may have a possible impact on how adolescents are communicating within the home and elsewhere. The following traits as described by Lynne C. Lancaster on Millennials (2004) may reveal some insight into the attitude of Millennials and how it affects their communication.

According Lancaster, Millennials are known as the ‘Digital Generation’ born between 1982 and 2000, they are media and technology savvy, expect access to information 24 hours a day, acknowledge diversity and expect others to do so, they environmentally conscious and globally concerned and are will to try anything and adapt to change easily. Millennials embrace all things digital as they see the use of modern technology as a means of how they separate themselves from other generations. In using modern technology they are more likely to already have a profile created on a social networking website, connect to the internet wirelessly through a phone, portable notebook or laptop, and post videos of themselves and others online (Lancaster, 2004).

Furthermore, adolescents possessing these traits may consider that social media provides an easier way of life as they to communicate more through digital means. In fact, 89% of teens admit their lives are much easier because of the Internet and other devices such as cell phones, digital cameras, and iPods (Brynko, 2007). Millennials are
more likely to have a more of a positive attitude on modern technology as they see the good and the bad in their usage of a variety of digital gadgets, service and platforms. Overall, Americans feel that modern technology has made their lives easier with 74% of Millennials feeling that it’s easier than complicated. On the other hand, a modest majority of 52% of people feel that modern technology helps people use their time more wisely with 56% of that majority being Millennials. However, those of other generations are more divided where they feel modern technology usage helps them waste time. In regards to how modern technology bonds those to family and friends, 54% of Millennials and 52% of Gen Xers feel that new technology helps bring them closer to family and friends. Yet Baby boomers and those of the silent generation feel that new technology may in fact isolate people more (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 26). With this being said, could parents of the Baby Boomer or Generation X generation be hindering their adolescents in the long run by allowing them to constantly use the devices to access social media networks? Most American children now have access to home computers and are using them for everything from playing games to doing schoolwork to chatting with friends via e-mail to surfing the Web (Subrahmanyam et al., 2000c). In relation to communication between parents and adolescents, communication may be in jeopardy within the family due to the fact that teenagers are constantly surfing the Internet or playing games online. It may be possible that parents who fall into the Baby Boomer or Generation X category may have to choose alternative methods of communication as they may already have kids in college that are more technologically savvy than they are, question authority which could mean questioning the credibility of online social media websites and distrust institutions which may mean not comfortable with social media (Cox, 2004).
Additionally, Millennials being considered part of the digital generation have far more use of the Internet than those of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers which speaks to a possible lack of communication within the home. Studies have shown that Millennials use the Internet 90% more than Gen Xers and Baby Boomers and outweigh older adults in the usage of social networking sites with 75% of them having already created a social networking profile. They are using these social networking sites more frequently by visiting social networking sites several times a day. About three in ten Millennials (29%) that have their own social networking profile make several visits a day. And with this great Internet usage, what are Millennials using social media for? Millennials are using the Internet for Twitter where some 14% are comprised of Millennials. They are posting videos online where one-in-five have posted a video of themselves online. Most have also created personal profiles on Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Teenage Social Networking and Its Affects in the Home

After a careful philosophical analysis of why teenagers make decisions to communicate through social media outlets and the challenges parents face in the home with communication, it is important to focus on contributing factors. These factors would include how the use of social media has become the most popular form of communication for teens and how it has impacted their communication in the home.

Statistics demonstrate in a study by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2010a) teens have increasingly become avid users on social networking website with the most popular currently being Facebook and Twitter. As of September 2009, 93% of American teens between the ages of 12 and 17 went online, a number that has remained stable since
November 2006 and continues to increase. In comparison adults are less likely than teens to be online. Furthermore, statistics have also shown that 73% of online American teens ages 12 to 17 used an online social network website. Teens who go online daily are also more likely to use social network websites. Further statistics have shown that adults have increased their usage of social networking websites yet remain as a whole less likely than teens to use these sites. As of September 2009, 47% of adults used a social networking website, compared with 73% of teens. However, adults are more known to use multiple online social networking sites with Facebook being the most used at 73%, MySpace at 48% and Linked In at 14% (Lenhart et al., 2010b). These statistics easily support that usage of social media is prevalent by teens and adults therefore impacts communication in the home.

**The Pros and Cons of Social Media**

The use of social media can directly shape and form the behavioral patterns of teenagers as they learn develop a sense of self and form their own opinions and judgments based on their peer-to-peer communication within online social networks. The communication techniques that they develop may possibly be a direct result of these learned behaviors and could be derived from their social networking. However, social networking could prove to be benefit or negative influence on teens and their overall behavior and communication skills.

According to Dr. Larry Rosen of the American Psychological Association (2011a), the effects of social networking that include “teens who use Facebook more often show more narcissistic tendencies while young adults who have strong Facebook presence show more signs of other psychological disorders, including antisocial
behaviors, mania and aggressive tendencies.” This could lead to the introversion of teens as they may find it difficult to communicate effectively with their family, friends and teachers. Rosen (2011b) also states that daily overuse of media and technology has a negative effect on the health of all children, preteens and teenagers by making them more prone to anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders, as well as making them more susceptible to future health problems. These problems could result in physical and physiological illnesses that will be hard for teens do deal with as adults. Further studies have shown other risks posed to teens excessively using online media, which include cyber bullying which is another form of harassment by using information rather than physical contact to intentionally harm someone. Sexting is defined as the sending or receiving of sexually - explicit or sexually - suggestive images or video via a cell phone (Hinduja & Patchin, n.d.). Facebook depression is a rather new discovery of individuals who experience prolonged time periods on Facebook; and finds themselves faced with denied friend requests, exclusion from groups or conversations and privacy sometimes being breached (O’Keeffe et al., 2012). Other activities may also be at risk due to high Internet usage in the home. Subrahmanyan et al (2000d) makes a point to demonstrate how Internet usage has an effect on the physical well being of a teenager, academic performance, and violent behavior. These are all major factors in which parents need to be aware of when allowing their teens to go online without proper supervision or time restraints. However, according to a couple of assumptions from the uses and gratification theory these negative impacts may possibly be able to be mitigated if better decisions are based around the usage. One assumption from the theory is that teens use the media to their advantage and determine just how much they want to absorb and how
much they will allow it to influence their decisions (Rossi, 2002). It is possible that not allowing social media to influence decisions rather than guide or assist could lessen the risk of negative outcomes. The other assumption states that the audience can determine the value of media content and basically make a choice on what media they will use and how they will use it (Katz et al., 1973). Again, it is possible that adolescents could feel more empowered to decide how they will use the media that could perhaps be for more positive endeavors that could work to their benefit.

On the other hand, the benefits of social networking helps teenagers who are more introverted learn how to socialize in various methods whether it is a cell phone or computer (Rosen, 2011c). According to the uses and gratifications theory, from the assumption that teens are able to recreate themselves and come into their own awareness (Boyd, 2008) introverted teens may be able to use social media to find alternative ways to communicate if they are comfortable with how they have recreated themselves. In turn, these other methods of communications could provoke parents to become more tech savvy so that they are able to successful communicate with their introverted teenagers given another method of communication other than face-to-face. Another benefit is social networking is helping students connect with their peers outside of the classroom by exchanging ideas about assignments and teachers are also using the online platform as a teaching tool. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011), has also stated that pediatricians are in a unique place which allows them to inform and educate families about the intricate dynamics of the social media technological environment and the challenging social and health concerns that online youth experience by encouraging families to face the harmful effect so social media communication.
The Impact of Social Media on the Millennials

The impact of social media on the Millennials or Generation Y may have a possible impact on how adolescents are communicating within the home. The traits below may possibly provide a context that may explain the behavior of Millennials around communication. According to a study by Lynne C. Lancaster on Millennials (2004) the traits below are described:

• Born between 1982 and 2000 know as the “Digital Generation”
• Media and technology savvy; cyber literate
• Expect access to information 24 hours a day
• Acknowledge diversity and expect others to do so
• Environmentally conscious and globally concerned
• Willing to try anything and adapt to change easily

These traits can help explain how Millennials embrace all things digital as they see the use of modern technology as a means of how they separate themselves from other generations. In using modern technology they are more likely to already have a profile created on a social networking website, connect to the internet wirelessly through a phone, portable notebook or laptop, and post videos of themselves and others online (2004). Furthermore, studies have shown that Millennials use the Internet 90% more than Gen Xers and Baby Boomers.
CHAPTER III: SCOPE AND METHODS

Scope of the Study

The focus of this study is to identify adolescent communication within families and how social media is affecting this level of communication. The Uses and Gratification Theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Being able to put a relation between why teens use an increasingly amount of social media and the gratification these teenagers gain from social media use; was a major component in this study. Adolescents are turning to social media as we have learned in Chapter 2 of this study. According to the uses and gratifications approach, individuals try to satisfy needs by means of media use (Roe & Minnebo, 2007, p. 305). This study was completed using a quantitative research approach to determine if communication has changed within the home because of adolescent social media use.

Methodology of the Study

This study uses a focus group research method. Conducting a focus group allowed the researcher to examine how this group of individuals interact and gain specific knowledge of their experience of how social media has effected their adolescent communication.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach will allow this study to have a less formal approach of gathering the data needed to complete the study. This approach also enables the participants to speak freely about their concerns of the communication impacting their adolescents because of social media to the group. Being able to speak freely throughout the group will give other participants ideas of how to cope with possible lack of communication in their homes due to social media use. Being able to ask
open-ended questions offers a more flexible method of research to gain insight of the communication dynamic within the home of each family. This also allowed the interviewer to get a deeper understanding of how each parent feels about increase of social media and adolescents and the possible affects on their teenagers. Thus, offering a better focus group conversation all around.

Participants

In order to make certain this focus group was success part within the study there had to a diverse group of individuals invited to partake in this study. There were fifteen individuals total that participated willingly. Each participant was a parent of an adolescent between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. These parents were from different parts of Los Angeles, CA. region, different age ranges, and as well as different genders. Because the group was of different backgrounds and ages, this gave the study a wide-range of results. Some parents’ only have one child whom is a teenager, while other parent had multiple children. Another major component of the group is some participants are single parents and others are in a two-parent household. This allowed the interviewer to get a full understanding of the informants thought processes and if social media has affected the communication skills of a teenager of younger versus older parents.

Instruments

In order to make sure this focus group was well organized and successful there were a few different forms, which were used throughout this gathering.

- Consent form (See Appendix A): Consent forms were distributed to the group of parents to enable their input to be used for this study.
Qualitative Questionnaire (See Appendix B): A form with five open-ended questions that were asked by the interviewer. These questions were passed out at the beginning of the focus group so the participants can begin thinking about how they handle the social media impact on communication within their households.

**Process and Procedures**

This section of the chapter will discuss the procedures that need to be conducted to complete the focus group successfully. The focus group took approximately two hours and thirty minutes. During this time, the interviewer was able to give a description of how this focus group was going to be conducted and the goals of the focus group. After the introductions have been completed, everyone was given a consent form for read and sign giving authorization to use their input for this study (See Appendix A). These individuals were given one hour of an open forum to discuss how the communication within their family has been affected by their teenagers’ use of social media. This open forum gave the interviewer the ability to primarily listen to the group, which gave the interviewer an understanding of how these parents perceive the social media effect on the communication with their teenagers.

Once the open forum was complete each participant was given questionnaires, so the interviewing portion of the focus group can be conducted (See Appendix B). The questionnaire that will be used will help the study achieve its main goal of determining if there truly is an impact on adolescent communication within their families because of social media. Being able to offer participants a list of open-ended questions gave the group the opportunity to speak about their experiences and possibly gain knowledge from other parents in the group.
After the focus group was complete, the next step in the process is to analyze the data thoroughly. Analyzing this data will offer a clear outcome of results based off the participants’ group interviews during the focus group. The first step in the analyzing process is to group all the data in specific categories. These categories will consist of grouping the participants by age of teenager(s), single parents vs. two-parent families, and how many teens live in the home. This will give the study an idea of how these different individuals may have similarities in their way of thinking in regard to the main topic of the study. The next step in the procedure process will be to take those groups and review each one methodically to get an understanding how these parents have learned how to deal with social media in their homes. Once the review process is complete, the goal is to then take this data and come up with a theory. This will entail gathering all data from the focus group and coming up with a conclusion based off the answers from the questionnaire. This will also involve putting together a spreadsheet and or graph with percentages to show the readers the outcome of this qualitative research. In order to make certain the data is put into the correct categories that will provide a positive outcome of the focus group, the data will be collected and analyzed by using the coding method. The coding method uses the notes that were taken during the focus group to identify themes to help place the data into certain categories. These categories are then used to measure and analyze the data more thoroughly.

**Ethical Considerations**

When conducting a qualitative research focus group, ethical considerations have to be addressed. This focus group was put together using participants with non bias points of views, which will allow a broader approach to this study. Everyone, whom contributed
his or her input in the interviewing process of this thesis project, was readily prepared with all of the knowledge pertaining to this research study. Participants were also able to withdraw from this study at anytime, which gave more comfort to the individuals offering their time and attention for this study.

All of this information and more was clearly spoken upon on the consent form which was passed out to the group at the beginning of the interviewing process, to make certain their rights were being upheld during this research study (See Appendix A). All participants had to acknowledge and sign this consent form in order to move on to the interviewing process of this research study.
CHAPTER IV: THE STUDY

This study investigates how social media has affected adolescent communication with their family. The participants were comprised of fifteen parents of teenagers between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. By using a qualitative research approach by holding a focus group, which lasted two and a half hour. This study posed a variety of different questions to a group of parents of adolescents to provide evidence of whether or not social media has an affect on adolescent communication skills within their family. The focus group was asked to answer five open-ended questions in an open forum capacity (see Appendix B). These questions were asked as a conversational method of research, which allowed the participants to engage in conversation within one another. The moderator was mainly there to listen and take notes about the conversation as the parents opened up about their thoughts, experience, and knowledge on the subject at hand.

Results of the Study

When the focus group was conducted all participants were asked five open-ended questions, using a conversational method. These questions were used to understand and examine thoroughly how parents of teenagers view the communication with their teens; and if social media has affected that communication. After these conversational questions were completed, these questionnaires were divided into categories. These categories allow a determination to be made of whether or not this group of parents believes if social media is having an effect on their communication with their adolescents. The categories consisted of the following:

• Age of teenager(s)
• Single parent households vs. two parent households

• How many teens live in the home

The information of these categories was given when asking parents of adolescents to participate in this research study. This category format also helps the study get a point of view of different parenting skills, which was important to justify if social media does affect adolescent communication skills. Being able to listen to these parents as they speak about their communication methods with their teens was very helpful; especially when the single parents have a different mind frame then a non-single parent. These categories also allowed the study to illustrate how parents of multiple teens are a bit more informed about social media rather then the parent with only one teenager or a one child. Another focus group method that was used was the “Coding Method.” This method allows the study to be streamlines further by using the categories above. Being able to use a color-coding system and themes from the notes taken throughout the focus group; allowed for a more thorough analysis. This open-ended conversational questioning portion of the focus group was a great way to lead into the next section of questioning; which was more of a straightforward approach.

Once these parents began to open up and share their frustrations with their teenagers and what social media has done, the conversation began to take flight. On one instance in particular the group was asked: \textit{Have you ever had conversations with your teenager(s) about topics pertaining to downside of social media? (Ex: Cyber Bullying, Sexting)} This particular question raised eye-brows amongst the group mainly because the parents of the group are oblivious to the dangers of the social media. Some of the parents in the focus group believe that ‘nothing bad can happen to their teenagers.’ After
giving these parents facts and statistics about Cyber Bullying and Sexting, the group of parents then became to ponder those statistics and began to take notes during the focus group.

After listening to the participating parents and gathering all of the feedback the results were apparent that this group of people all think the same way. These parents, who come from different walks of life and have teenagers of different ages, all felt the same way about how the communication within their home was being affected by social media. A couple of major themes arose during and right receiving feedback from the parents. As stated above, these parents come from “different walks of life” therefore bringing about the theme of diversity and more so diversity across cultures. It was apparent that there was a true mix of ethnicities among the parents and their kids, which led to an understanding of how different ethnic groups use social media. Is social media usage the same for every ethnic group or do certain ethnicities use social media differently? Furthermore, an examination into how social media was used between genders, age groups, economic classes, and etc. Which group used it more or less and why? While this seemed to be a rather broad them it was definitely a very relevant them and you begin to examine how households are using social media.

“I don’t have time to manage my teenagers every move on the Internet because I’m busy with my other children and working everyday,” is what one focus group participant stated when voicing her opinion about social media in her household. After this participant stated this comments, many of the other single parent households immediately agreed. In converse, the two parent households said the exact opposite. One participant was quick to respond to the above comment by saying “I don’t have time
either but I make time to talk to my teenager about his Internet usage and I monitor his social media websites; and we make sure we have face-to-face conversations at least a four times a week.” The moderator then felt the need to hone in on these comments and dig deeper to truly understand the concerns of the parents.

While the amount of time spent with social media seemed to be commonly abundant with all of the teenagers this “time” issue can ultimately lead to other issues that was brought up by only a couple of participants. From one very concerned parent “With the amount of time my teenager spends texting and on Facebook, I worry about their health. My kid isn’t as active anymore and I’m finding that he isn’t getting as much sleep as he should”. According to an article from Psychology Today (2011), the Kaiser Foundation conducted a study that found that teens spend 53 hours per week engaged in some type of electronic media and that mobile media was on the rise. These behaviors were found to interfere in their sleep, cause mood swings and possibly lead to obesity, high-blood pressure and depression.

The moderator began to ask the participants if they feel they ‘need’ to monitor their teen’s social media use; or do they feel they trust their teen to ‘do the right thing’? Being able to listen to these parents about the communication with this teenagers offered a variety of results; but one thing is for certain and that is communication is being affected in their home due to social media. Some parent of the focus group stated that they ‘wished they could ban social media from their teens’ but they know their teenagers will find a way to ‘Facebook their friends’ or ‘Tweet.’ “I do feel better now that I know I’m not alone battling communication with my sixteen year old because of social media,” one parent admitted to the focus group. Social media is here to stay and parents and
adolescents have to learn how to work together on their communication skills to make certain they maintain a positive family relationship. This focus group resulted in parents understanding how and why social media is playing a major roll in their households. These parents understand what needs to be done in order to persevere communication with their teenagers now that social media a factor. A major point taken from the focus group among all parents were that they ultimately knew that they can begin to feel empowered to be the authoritarian and set rules and boundaries with their teenagers on when and how much social media can be used at home. As technology continues to grow and expand into every aspect of life usage can still be controlled.

**Discussion**

These results are very important to not only the parents with teenagers, but also everyone who interacts with teenagers. Teenagers play a major roll in society and teenagers have to start their communication skills within their families. Social media will continue to gain use by not only teenagers; but by all individuals regardless of age and communication amongst others has to increase with social media use is here to stay. The results from this study are also extremely important to parents because this may help them resolve any communication issues they may have with their adolescent. Parents should take away from the focus group the ability to ask their own teenagers open-ended questions to open and maintain a line of communications. Another result of this study is that parents are now more aware of the potential affect of social media on their teenagers’ communication; and these parents are able to find tips and advice of how to handle a possible lack of communication within their family and their teenager.
This study also allowed parents of adolescents to understand why there may be a communication breakdown with their adolescents. When parents had to answer questions during the focus group about how social media and their adolescent communication, parents may also begin to think about other causes of the lack of communication with their teenager. Many teenagers may not feel comfortable talking to their families openly because they may possibly be cyber bullied on their social media networking sites. Statistics show that “well over half of young people do not tell their parents when cyber bullying occurs” (Bullying Statistics, n.d.) Adolescents spend large amounts of time using social media and this has a vast effect on the communication skills of teens within the family unit. Some parents have to essentially learn how to converse with their teens in a manner that is beneficial for both parties and this is also a learning tool from this study. This will allow for a healthy relationship going forward.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

Even though this thesis study was conducted as fair as possible and with an open mind; there are many limitations. This study used the method of a qualitative survey to conduct data collection; however, there are many limitations to this format of study. This particular study only used fifteen willing participants; but fifteen people are not enough people to make an actual analysis of whether or not adolescent communication is affected by social media use within their families. An additional survey study could have been conducted to include teenagers between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. This additional survey with teenagers will offer a different scope and allow the adolescents to offer their participation on the subject matter. This survey could also have been given via online, which will allow an increased amount of teenagers to participate in the study.

Further Study Recommendations

While conducting this study, there are additional opportunities to continue more research to determine if social media is having an affect on adolescent communication skills within families. A recommendation for further study can consist of conduction a survey with over one hundred parents from different regions of the world. This will offer a wide range of data that will display how other cultures in societies view social media, and how parents of teenagers handle social media. Another recommendation would be to interview high school teachers. Interviewing teachers would also offer another scope to possible help parents understand the social skills of their teenagers in relation to social media. Teachers spend a large amount of time with teenagers and a teacher would be able to offer parents a different perspective from another adult standpoint.
Conclusion

This study was able to capture results of how a small group of individuals view their communication with their teenagers. Direct communication with teenagers has been a difficult task for parents for many generations; but now parents have to compete with the Internet and social media networking websites. Teenagers may be more comfortable and compelled to share their feeling with 500 of their Facebook friends, instead of speaking with their parents about different things going on within their lives. Being able to conduct a focus group using a qualitative method, has enabled a group of parents to become more open minded and more aware of social media. These parents are now more aware of how, what, and why their teenagers are using social media they way they are. As learned in this study, social media is continuing to increase among teenagers; and parents have to continuously make a strong attempt to maintain an open line of communication with their adolescents.

The ‘Millennials’ will continue to use social media to conduct relationships with their friends and possibly family members; and their parents have to understand the importance of technology in their lives. Even though this study has offered a vast amount of information, there is room for more studies. Conducting more studies on this topic will allow more parents across the country to learn more about how social media is affecting their teenager(s). Parents and adolescents may have to learn how to deal with social media and become more open to discussing this sensitive topic. Social media is here to stay and parents and adolescents have to start communicating about the positive and the negative side of social media within their family.
Appendices

Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Focus Group

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY MASTER’S PROGRAM THESIS

Erica Moseley, Communication and Leadership Master’s Degree Student

Thesis Project topic:
The effects of social media on adolescent communication skills within families.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH FOR THESIS PROJECT

I ______________________ have been notified and understand this research thesis project. I understand that I can withdraw from this focus group research study at anytime and my information will not be used for this research thesis project or released for any other projects if I choose to withdraw myself.

• I understand that the input I provide within this thesis project focus group will only be used for the purpose only.

• I understand that I will have an opportunity to verify the transcripts of the interviews prior to my information being publicized.

• I agree to take part in this research study to offer my input on the thesis topic, which is stated above.

Signature:

________________________________

Print Name:

________________________________

Date:

________________________________
Appendix B: Qualitative Questionnaire

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY MASTER’S PROGRAM THESIS FOCUS GROUP

QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

What are ways you increase the level of communication with your teenager when social media is a major part of their lives?

Do you think you need to monitor the social media networking sites your teenagers are a part of?

Do you think social media has impacts on your teenagers?

Have you ever had conversations with your teenager(s) about topics pertaining to downside of social media? (Ex: Cyber Bullying, Sexting)

Why do you think the media places so much emphasis on social media?
References:


