



The Quiet Consequences of Scrolling: Conceptualizing Social Media Wellness

Rahul Dhiman

Assistant Professor- Department of Commerce & Management, SCD Government College, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

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Abstract— This conceptual review investigates the emerging paradigm of Social Media Wellness (SMW) and its potential implications for family relationships. It synthesizes literature on digital engagement behaviors, psychological and social outcomes of excessive platform usage, and proposes a theoretical lens to understand how digital well-being aligns with familial cohesion. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, this review emphasizes how digital routines, emotional reliance on online interactions, and constant connectivity can affect the emotional climate of households. The review offers a framework for future empirical studies and highlights the importance of awareness among individuals, educators, and policymakers to ensure healthier digital-social integration.

Keywords— Social Media Wellness, family relationships, digital engagement, emotional climate, digital well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, digital interactions are deeply woven into daily life. Social media platforms—once tools for convenience—have evolved into powerful spaces influencing identity, emotion, and relationships. While these platforms offer connectivity, they also provoke digital overload, fragmented attention, and emotional volatility (Verduyn et al., 2017; Buchi et al., 2019). As people increasingly turn to online environments for affirmation, entertainment, and information, the dynamics of offline relationships, especially within families, are shifting.

The construct of Social Media Wellness (SMW) has emerged in response to these disruptions. Unlike digital detox or pathology-based models that frame internet usage as addiction, SMW promotes balance, regulation, and emotional clarity while using social platforms (Anderson et al., 2024). In this paper, we explore how conceptualizing SMW can provide insights into its relationship with family well-being and offer a foundation for intervention.

SOCIAL MEDIA WELLNESS: A CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION:

The term wellness, traditionally used in physical and mental health contexts, now extends to digital engagement. Wellness includes “balance across and within dimensions” of life—social, emotional, spiritual, and physical (Adams et al., 1997). In digital terms, this implies thoughtful, non-disruptive, and enriching use of social media.

Several scholars describe how online behaviours—such as endless scrolling, compulsive engagement, or obsessive monitoring—are associated with psychological stress, emotional fatigue, and reduced life satisfaction (Dhir et al., 2021; Buda et al., 2020). These patterns can interfere with rest, daily priorities, and interpersonal connections. The concept of SMW integrates emotional regulation, behavioral moderation, and cognitive awareness in online interaction.

Moreover, SMW is not just about personal experience—it reflects the social ecology of digital life.

For instance, expectations to remain perpetually available and responsive online can induce digital stress (Steele et al., 2020), which may spill over into home settings, influencing how individuals relate to family members.

OFFLINE IMPACT OF ONLINE ENGAGEMENT:

Family systems are particularly sensitive to technological intrusions. Traditional models of family cohesion rely on in-person interaction, quality time, and shared values (James et al., 2017). However, these elements may be compromised by digital distraction, especially when online presence takes precedence over real-time interaction.

Studies show that many young adults prefer virtual engagements over physical ones, with social media usage becoming a habitual behavior that reshapes attention and communication (Mertz et al., 2023; Mahmoud & Shafik, 2020). Evidence from recent research points to diminished face-to-face conversations and missed social rituals (e.g., shared meals, family outings) as by-products of immersive social media use (Sharaievska & Stodolska, 2016).

Furthermore, the emotional consequences of online exposure—such as envy, frustration, or unrealistic comparisons—can create latent tension in offline interactions (Naderer et al., 2021). Feelings of exclusion, over-sharing, or indirect expression of grievances online can indirectly weaken intra-family trust and openness.

EMERGING ISSUES IN DIGITAL WELLNESS:

- **Psychological Spillovers**

Digital platforms frequently stimulate a wide range of emotional responses—from joy and belonging to anxiety and dissatisfaction (Valkenburg et al., 2022). These emotions, when not managed consciously, may manifest in interpersonal settings, influencing mood and communication style at home.

- **Behavioral Intrusions**

Studies have documented that screen time late at night, often driven by social notifications or compulsive checking, disrupts natural sleep cycles (Schoor et al., 2018). Poor sleep can alter temperament and reduce availability for family engagement the next day, making digital routines a key influencer of emotional presence.

- **Erosion of Boundaries**

Social media has blurred boundaries between private and public life. Users often share personal stories, celebrations, or grievances online, potentially sidelining close, intimate discussions with family. This trend raises questions about relational authenticity and privacy saturation in domestic spheres (Dhir et al., 2021).

- **Monitoring and Surveillance Culture**

A rising behavioral concern is the normalization of monitoring others' activities online—a subtle yet pervasive form of digital control (Smoker & March, 2017). Within families, this may manifest as mistrust, perceived surveillance, or emotional withdrawal, especially in households where digital transparency replaces direct communication.

II. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the themes identified above, we propose a conceptual framework where social media wellness is positioned as a mediating construct between digital behavior and family well-being. Rather than isolating variables, we categorize digital challenges into three broad clusters:

- **Emotional Overdependence** (e.g., seeking validation online, mood affected by social feedback)
- **Behavioral Disruption** (e.g., sleep interference, attention diversion during family time)
- **Relational Disengagement** (e.g., reduced communication, preference for digital over physical presence)

These clusters interact with one another and collectively influence family dynamics (Dhir et al. 2021; Gui et al. 2017; Valkenburg & Driel 2022). We recommend that future empirical research test this triadic model using moderation and mediation analysis techniques to explore how different household demographics experience these dynamics.

IMPLICATIONS:

- **For Educators**

Curriculum design in schools and universities can incorporate digital wellness literacy, teaching students to reflect on their digital choices and

understand their social-emotional consequences (Anderson et al., 2024).

- **For Families**

Families can benefit from establishing digital rituals – such as screen-free dinners or shared log-off times – to reinforce in-person bonding. Parental modeling plays a crucial role in shaping children's long-term digital habits (Savci et al., 2020).

- **For Policymakers**

National campaigns focused on responsible digital behavior and family-first engagement can promote social awareness. Posters, infographics, or even AI-based interventions can be deployed to sensitize users to balance digital engagement with relational integrity (Mertz et al. 2023; Seabrook et al. 2016).

III. CONCLUSION

The notion of social media wellness has evolved from an individual-centered idea into a relational necessity. As this review shows, unbalanced digital practices are not just personal concerns—they shape emotional climates and social structures, beginning with the family. Conceptualizing and promoting SMW offers a pathway toward more harmonious coexistence between digital life and real-life bonds. Future research must further refine this construct, explore cultural nuances, and design context-specific interventions that support healthy digital living.

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