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Research Insights
Изследователски проникновения

PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING THROUGH THE PRISM OF TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract. Social networks have become an integral part of our lives, providing mediated interaction and thus allowing us to interact with each other and build virtual communities. We see significant threats to social networking especially in family and institutional settings. For this reason, the present study aimed to investigate the use of social networking sites by student teachers, in the context of their impact on family interactions. Our findings show that "significant popularity" is observed in the use of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, with more than half of the respondents spending 2-4 hours per day on social networking sites. Through correlation analysis, we confirmed a positive relationship between the 'online' time students spend on social media during the working week and at the weekend. We can confirm that students who spend more time on social networks during the work week also spend more time on social networks during the weekend, despite the fact that many just return home to their families during the weekend. The study highlights the need for a balanced use of social networking, not only in the context of college students' family environments.

Keywords: family relationshipsм; conflicts; social networks; students; online communication; shared content

Introduction

Technology and social networking are an integral part of modern life, gaining attention in almost every country, industry or within any age group. However, as Krejčí (2019) points out, "we are moving from a culture that uses technology to a culture that has been consumed by it, technology and media are dominating our lives like never before, we are increasingly feeling the information avalanche of incoming emails, text messages, chat". It is clear that the scope of social networks is wide-ranging, affecting not only individual behaviour but also social interactions and relationships, while transforming the way we communicate and spend our leisure time (in the family, in school or in social settings).

Societal paradigms of the social networking boom

A significant milestone in the territory of the former Czechoslovakia is February 13, 1992, according to Zeman (2019), when the common state was solemnly connected to the Internet. In its early days, only 5 % of households were connected to the internet, and these were mainly IT professionals and employees of various companies. After the turn of the millennium, as digital infrastructure and hardware diversification were gradually built up, the proportion of households with personal technological possessions - computers, laptops, but also smartphones and tablets – accelerated significantly. As Tomková et al. (2013), "the rise of the Internet has brought more diverse opportunities as a medium, a distinctive feature being that one is not only a receiver in relation to the content mediated by the medium, but also acts as a creator and interactant with the content (which stimulates thinking as well as imagination and creativity), with people, and with wider social systems".

The term 'social media', first used in 1994 to refer to an online media environment called 'Matisse', naturally comes to the fore. We are still talking about the era of the commercial Internet, when the first social media platforms were being developed and launched (Bercovici 2010). The term social media has evolved over time, and is currently generally used to refer to an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of online platforms, including blogs, business networks, projects, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo and video sharing, product reviews, social bookmarking, games, networking, or virtual worlds (Aichner et al. 2020). Social media defines the possibility of Web 2.0, the second generation of the Internet aimed at improving interaction, collaboration and sharing among users to create and share online content (Kaplan, Haenlein 2010). It is possible to work on peer-to-peer projects through collaborative sharing via cloud computing. Weblogs, blogs and vlogs present an opportunity for users to share online diaries, pictures, videos that other Internet users can access and comment on. Content sharing sites for sharing videos, photos, slideshows or text include YouTube, Instagram, Slideshare. In the virtual gaming world, players are allowed to create an "alter ego" and play the games offered (Kuss, Griffiths 2017).

In succession, we have various social networking sites dating back to 1995. The site www.classmates.com was created in 1995 with a focus on connections with former classmates (Tariq, Mehboob, Khan, and Ullah 2012). In 1997, the first social network, SixDegrees, was created as a result of the idea that individuals are connected through six degrees of separation, but already with the creation of profiles (Boyd, Ellison 2008).

The difference between social networks and social media is that social networks focus mainly on connecting people, so it is a specific way of using social media (Kuss, Griffiths 2017). We define social networks as virtual communities where users create a personal public profile. At the same time, they interact with other people, usually based on common interests (Kuss, Griffiths 2011). Backstrom et

al. (2006) define social networking sites not only as web services that allow users to create public or private profiles on the system, they can also create various shared lists among users. The uniqueness of social networking sites comes in the formulation and openness of their own content, creating interconnections and relationships between people. However, it is not always about finding new contacts, but rather communicating with an already existing extended network of users (Haythornthwaite 2005).

Social networks in Slovakia experienced their boom only after 2000, and as Tomková et al. (2015), we note Pokec.sk, which from 2009 began to compete with Facebook, which became the most widespread social network. Abroad, Facebook was established in 2004, initially serving as an online community for Harvard students, gradually spreading around the world and becoming one of the most well-known social networks (Kuss, Griffiths 2011).

Gradually, other social networks emerged and are still used today. The YouTube platform was founded in 2005, it is known as the networking site with the largest base of videos. Through YouTube, people post their videos and interact with others from anywhere in the world. Following Twitter, which was founded in 2006 initially for entrepreneurs to reach out to new clients or in sharing important information (Akram 2018).

In succession also Whatsapp currently in use in over 180 countries, which was founded in 2009 and allows its user to be in touch with others anywhere and anytime (Whatsapp Inc. 2024), Instagram, which is owned by Facebook and was launched in 2010, with findings showing that up to 95 % of Instagram users also use Facebook, mostly to post their photos and videos (Akram 2018).

The range of social networks available to us today has expanded rapidly in the last decade. Wattman, Benson (2013) rank Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and others among the most widely used. Specifically in institutional settings, they mention several social networking sites (e.g., Tumblr, Flicker, Google Today, Edmodo) that allow their users to create profiles, share email addresses, post pictures and initiate discussions, as well as the ability to participate in endless exchanges of information on both a personal and professional level.

Social networks as predictors of living standards

The rise of social networking and social networking has transformed the lifestyle of the individual, which Kraus (2015) characterizes as a set of habits, norms, values and relationships that make up a person's "life modus". One of the areas is leisure, and as Kuss, Griffiths (2017) write, social networks have gradually become a leisure time filler for many people, allowing them to connect with each other without limitations in time or space. According to current statistical analyses, there are currently up to 5.7 billion social network users in the world (Statista 2024). From a survey of social networking users across countries, it was found that the Philippines

has the highest frequency in usage (up to 3.7 hours per day), compared to America – 1.7 hours per day, or England – 1.5 hours per day (Statista 2015). The current statistical findings show an increasing trend in the frequency of social networking use, the average time in using social networking sites was up to 2.16 hours in the United States of America. In comparison, the Czech Republic had an average daily participation of 1.47 hours in 2023 (Statista 2024). Slovakia was the most frequent user of Facebook by phone in 2023 (85%), according to AMIDigital's research, and users spent an average of 2.95 hours per day on the network – AMIDigital.

The use of social networking sites undeniably brings many positives and negatives to the life of modern man. According to Zarate et. al. (2024), it is essential to distinguish the purpose for which they are used, i.e. whether it is for professional, academic or personal purposes, which can result in addictions. It is a psychological addiction because it displays symptoms of behavioural dependence (Sun, Zhang, 2021), related to reduced productivity, neglect of responsibilities, compulsive checking of social media accounts and disruption of personal interactions (Gómez-Galán et al. 2020).

Including psychological symptoms, social media addiction can also cause physical symptoms such as eye pain or sleep disturbances (Kuss, Griffiths 2017). Turkle (2015), based on an examination of years of research in the online space, argues that prolonged use of technology has led to a reduction in social interactions and skills, resulting in an inability to maintain and establish new relationships. A new term "alone together" was also coined which meant that people were connected through technology but in reality isolated from one another (Turkle 2013).

The use of social networking sites can influence the behaviour of young people and teenagers. Society has begun to talk about the role of social networks in influencing behaviour and the social and psychological implications of this phenomenon. Research findings from 2023 conclude that young people in the online world use social validation-based behaviours to gain recognition from their peers. In other words, young people share their content on social networks to gain recognition from their friends of a similar age. Through social networking, they build their social identity and strengthen their self-image (Nabila 2023). Presenting oneself on social networking sites also has negative consequences, especially in building feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction with oneself, or fostering unhealthy social pressure. Among other things, it also contributes to misperceptions of beauty standards and consequent inclination towards unrealistic norms (Nabila 2023). Negative communication patterns and toxicity have become increasingly entrenched on social media platforms over time, along with numerous misinformation campaigns, a culture of internet trolls, a tendency towards polarisation and extreme content (Nelimarkka et al. 2018). As many as 91 % of Americans in a survey stated that they consider cyberbullying and online harassment to be the biggest problem in the online space (Vogels, Vogels 2021).

The influence of social networks inherently permeates the institutional environment, bringing with it many opportunities but also threats. Akram (2018) states that social platforms allow students to share ideas and learn new knowledge, even at an early age, especially through effective ways. Correspondingly, according to Anouti, Rouadi (2019), they provide pupils with the opportunity to fix and update their own information library through the different features that each application has.

The positives include better preparation for future employment or for upcoming changes influenced by the evolution of the world. Research has confirmed that when teachers post legitimate assignment-related information on social media, they help lower-achieving students (Akram 2018). Other positives include the networked nature of the world; students can interact with their peers interested in the same topic in different parts of the world (Abbas et al. 2019).

On the other hand, it is alarming that access to social networks is unrestricted, allowing almost anyone to use the platforms created and add their own content, which is mostly not subject to further control. According to the findings of Abbas et al. (2019), many students have come to rely on information and data in the online space to complete their assignments without verifying the veracity of the knowledge. It is evident, consistent with Anouti, Rouadi (2019), that the frequent use of social networking sites has changed the way individuals think, communicate, learn, and socialize. Many students have developed too strong relationships with social networks and virtual reality has become more important to them than the environment in which they live, whether at home or at school. As Schaefer (2016) writes, pupils are not able to make good use of the accumulated online information that is accessible to everyone to build their knowledge, but on the contrary, their level of critical thinking is reduced.

Weaknesses affect, among other things, the area of motivation; according to Akram (2018), pupils are lazier, less motor skilled and practically "addicted" to information provided through social networks. They work out school tasks without trying to understand them. Easy access to any required information has thus reduced pupils' skills and their ability to learn. Reflecting on the findings of Stanford University (Schaefer 2016), students who are distracted by the use of social networking sites while working are unable to concentrate or use their cognitive senses in assignments as compared to regular students.

Frequent use of social networking sites also reduces students' face-to-face conversation skills because they are more comfortable talking in virtual reality without the need to express their feelings. They choose online space instead of direct interaction with their surroundings and lose motivation to do anything in real life. Creating a universal language is also a problem, so they communicate through shortcuts of words they use when typing through apps instead of improving their grammar, oral and writing skills (Akram 2018).

Research

The research data collection was conducted through a quantitative research strategy. The main *research objective* was to investigate the use of social networking sites in the families of undergraduate student teachers.

In the context of the above research objective, we set the following research questions:

– What social networks do current undergraduate teaching students prefer?

– What is the frequency of social network use during the work week and during the weekend?

– What content, in the context of type and frequency, is most frequently shared by current undergraduate students on social networks?

– Is sharing content on social networking sites a topic of discussion in the family setting as well?

– Does the timing of social networking use determine the frequency of online communication in the family?

In line with the stated objectives and research questions, we constructed two *research hypotheses:*

H1: Students who spend more time on social media during the work week also spend more time on social media during the weekend.

H2: The amount of time spent on social networking sites affects the frequency of online communication between students and their family.

We used a descriptive survey method - the *author's questionnaire* entitled "Social networks as an integral part of the family environment". The aim of the questionnaire was to find out whether social networks enter into the life of the contemporary family and thus influence social interactions between parents and their children.

The questionnaire included basic instructions about the objectives of the research inquiry, instructions for completion, and a core set of items focusing on the use of social networking sites in the families of college students. At the same time, we implemented different types of scales in the research instrument, i.e., dichotomous scales, nominal scales, Likert scales with a presented scale, and others.

To find out the validity and reliability of the research instrument, we used Cronbach's alpha. The closer the value of the sum of variance is to 1, the more consistent the questionnaire is. To confirm sufficient internal consistency of the questionnaire (reliability), it is necessary to reach a decimal value of 0.7 (Tomšik 2019). The value of Cronbach's α for the questionnaire developed by us is 0.831, which confirms the sufficient reliability of the research instrument.

Prior to conducting the actual research, we administered a pilot test of the questionnaire in which five students (n = 5) participated. We predominantly reached out to second cycle undergraduate students, in order to obtain sufficient feedback for the subsequent correction of the research instrument and its adaptation to all

groups of students. The surveyed respondents confirmed the logical orderliness of the presented questionnaire. We noted reservations with the list of social networks, based on which we implemented additional visual networks in the questionnaire. The modification of the questionnaire was followed by a pre-survey in which eight students (n = 8), who are not part of the research population anyway, participated. Our attention was directed to the content of each questionnaire item. Respondents identified some items as redundant and lengthy, which made the questionnaire insufficiently motivating and thus did not meet the criterion of suitability for administration. For this reason, we reduced several items from the questionnaire.

We analyzed the responses and processed the results using mathematical and statistical methods and computer programs.

STATISTICA statistical software was used to process the questionnaire items and analyze the data. To verify the hypotheses, we used the non-parametric Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$).

We used the *nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test*, which Tomšik (2019) describes as the nonparametric equivalent of ANOVA analysis of variance, which is used for data that do not meet the equality of variances in order to detect significant differences in two or more groups based on the p-value (significance level). In our analyses, we rely on a significance level of 5 % (alpha = 0.05), which means that if the significant frequencies come out less than or equal to 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$), then the relationship is statistically significant. Subsequently, we used the *Mann – Whitney* U- test, which is a narrowing of the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, to compare the differences of two independent groups.

The questionnaire was administered in person in a university setting - University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, University of Žilina in Žilina. The research population consisted of *224 respondents* (n = 224), namely students of teaching study programmes of universities (1st level of higher education, n = 127; 2nd level of higher education, n = 97) – University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra and University of Žilina in Žilina.

The age distribution of the respondents is presented in Figure 1, and in terms of gender characteristics, females dominated (n = 195; 87.1 %), compared to males (n = 29; 12.9 %). As can be seen in Figure 2, the mean age of the respondents was n = 21.5 years, with a standard deviation of age of 1.67 years.

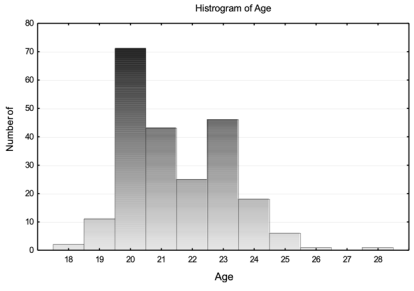

Figure 1.
Gender of *respondents*

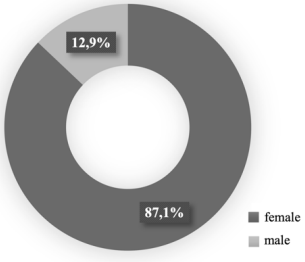

Figure 2.
Age distribution of *respondents*

Analysis and pedagogical interpretation of research results

In the above section, we evaluate the results of research to identify the use of social networking sites in the families of undergraduate students in Level I and Level II.

In the first part of the research, we investigated which ***social networking platforms*** are actively used by families in their households (whether students/ parents alone or together with parents).

As we can see from Figure 3, the most frequently used social media platform is the photo and video sharing service *Instagram* (n = 214; 96 %). This is followed by the video database – *YouTube*, which is used by up to 194 respondents (87 %) and the social networking site *Facebook*, which is used by 163 respondents (73 %).

On the other hand, a surprising finding is the fact that we see almost the same "popularity" for the audio and video streaming service – *Spotify*, which is used by up to 159 respondents (71 %), as well as the visual search engine – *Pinterest*, which is used by more than half of the respondents (n = 132; 59 %).

Numerous statistical analyses show that the social network – *TikTok*, which allows the uploading of short videos with music, live streaming or messaging, has also seen an unprecedented rise. These findings are also confirmed by the results of the present study (up to 125 students, or 56 %, use this platform). There is a relatively similar interest in *Snapchat*, a multimedia application for sending photos and videos, which is used by 84 students (38 %). Other social networking sites are used by a much smaller number of respondents – *Reddit* (29; 13 %), *Telegram* (25; 11 %), *Twitch* (23; 10 %), *Twitter* (15; 7%) and *Linkedln* (5; 2 %).

In the context of the above findings, it can be stated, although these are not surprising findings, that Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are among the most commonly preferred social media platforms in the environment of college students' families.

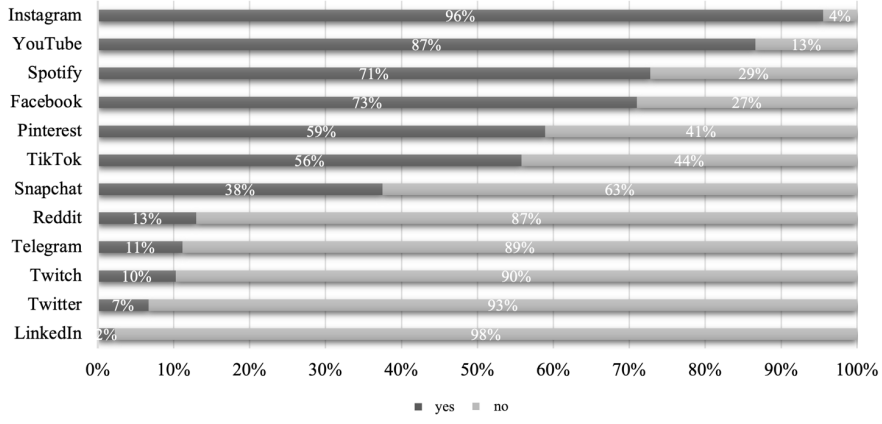

Figure 3. Overview of the use of social networking platforms

In the next part of the research, we investigated the ***frequency of social networking*** during the working week and at the weekend among the respondents. The answers to the questions "How long do you use social networking sites daily during the working week" and "How long do you use social networking sites daily during the weekend" are shown in Figure 4.

The data in Figure 4 shows that the largest proportion of students (n = 71; 36.2 %) spend an average of 2 hours per day on social networking sites during the weekdays. This is followed by students who use social networking sites for an average of 3 hours per day (n = 65; 29 %). Worryingly, up to more than a fifth of students use social networking sites for at least 4 hours a day or more on weekdays (53; 23.7 %). Only two students (0.9 %) reported spending a maximum of half an hour a day on social networking sites and the remaining 23 students (10.3 %) spent an average of 1 hour a day.

Comparing this data with the answers to the question "*How long do you use social media on a daily basis during the weekend?*" we find that there is a significant decrease in the number of students who spend an average of 2 hours per day on social networks during the weekend, by up to 40.7 % (n = 48 students), which in turn results in an increase in the number of students who spend 3 hours per day on social networks (86 students, an increase of 32.3 %) or even 4 or more hours per day (63 students, an increase of 18.9 %).

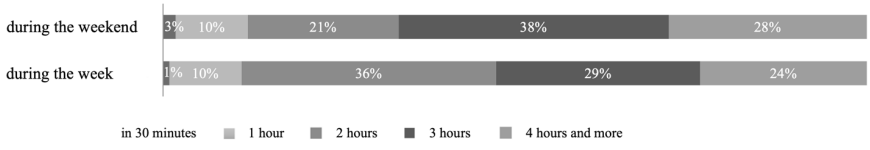

Figure 4. Frequency of use of social networks by respondents

Subsequently, we explored respondents' ***overall experiences*** of social networks, including in the context of their impact on relationships in the family environment. Several respondents (almost one third of the respondents) perceived the importance and positive role of social networks in strengthening family ties ("*since we have family abroad, we communicate with our family members mainly through social networks*", "*I am now at boarding school, I can connect with my parents and sister quickly and more often through social networks*"). In the context of modern social dynamics, the use of social networks can be a means of maintaining and further developing family relationships, but only if they are used purposefully and intelligently.

However, there were also individuals (n = 8) who shared the view that the use of social networking inevitably leads to a reduction in the time available for direct interaction in the real world, which can negatively affect not only communication but also the quality of interpersonal relationships in the family (e.g., "*I feel that I have withdrawn into myself and interact less with my family*", "*we have less time for each other*"). In addition, excessive time spent in the virtual world can have a negative impact on mental and physical health, increasing levels of stress, anxiety and depression – all of which in turn affect the quality of family relationships by reducing the ability to connect emotionally and empathically with family members.

Within social networks, we also focused on the area of ***content sharing*** (Figure 5). We investigated what kind of content is usually shared by the surveyed respondents on social networks. The most frequently shared content on social networks is personal updates, mainly in the form of photos and videos (33 %) – personal photos and videos from different events, places and experiences, etc. A large proportion of respondents also inform their friends about various important events (20 %) or post memories (17 %) related to such events on social networks. Less frequently, our respondents share on their social networks various interesting articles, links, viral videos or other content (12 %) that they found interesting and that might be of interest to their followers, but also information about their daily life (10 %) or their personal opinions (7 %) on current events, politics, culture, art and other topics. Only 2 respondents (1 %) said that they share their own blog and 10 respondents said that they do not share any content on social networks.

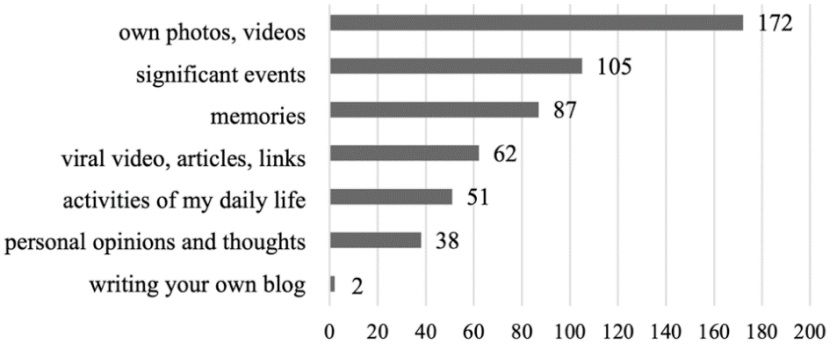

Figure 5. Type of content shared

As a follow-up, we investigated ***how often such content is shared*** by both our respondents and their family members. The responses to these questions revealed, in the context of the data in Figure 6, that 7 respondents (3 %) never share any content on social media, another 90 respondents (40 %) share various content on social media only very occasionally, and 68 respondents (30 %) share less than once a week. On the other hand, there is a group of respondents who share different content from their lives at least once a week – 1 or 2 times a week 32 students (15 %), almost daily 20 students (9 %) and every day 7 students (3 %). In case of sharing different content by family members, the situation looked as follows: 11 % of family members do not share any content on social networks, almost half (46 %) share content only occasionally. 18 % of family members share less than once a week, 14 % 1 or 2 times a week at most, 9 % almost daily and 2% of family members share different content on social networks every day.

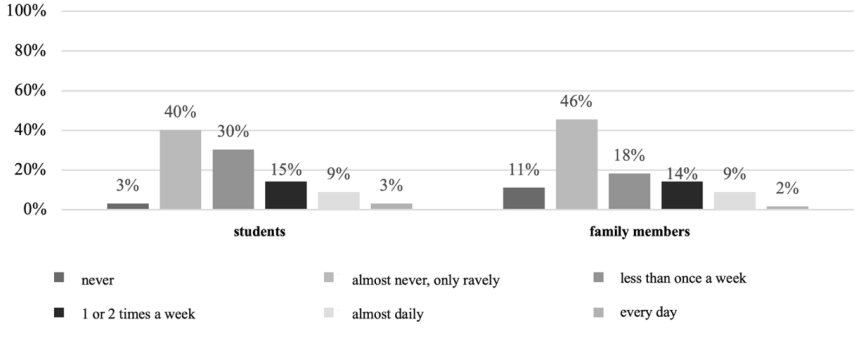

Figure 6. Frequency of sharing content on social networks (students, family members)

Discussing the content of social networking sites with family can have beneficial effects, especially for reasons of safety and privacy on social networking sites. The aim of such a discussion should not be to criticise the content itself, but above all to argue and share views. However, as our respondents' answers to this question, further detailed in Chart 7, showed, more than two-thirds of respondents (151; 68 %) hardly or rarely have discussions on this topic with their loved ones. Alarmingly, as many as 34 respondents (15 %) reported that they do not discuss such topics at all at home, and only the remaining 39 respondents (17 %), on the other hand, reported that they discuss these topics frequently at home.

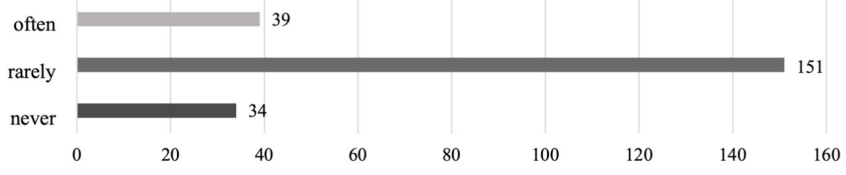

Figure 7. Discussions in the family about the content shared on social networks

Social networking may influence the emergence of conflicts in the family environment, whether because of time spent on social networks or because of differing views on the appropriateness of shared content, the ways in which social networks are used as a communication tool, and others. When asked whether our respondents had ever had ***disagreements*** with family members in the past because of their use of social networking sites (Figure 8), 97 respondents (43 %) answered in the affirmative, while the vast majority of respondents – 127 (57 %) – had not yet had such disagreements with family members.

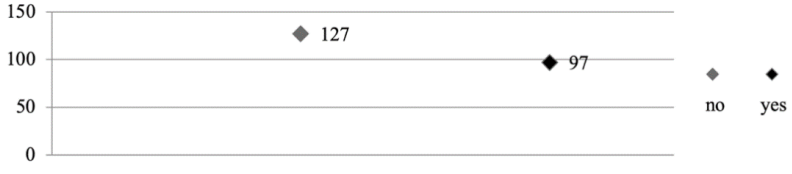

Figure 8. Disagreements with family members over the use of social networks

We also investigated ***how students react*** when a family member posts something offensive on social media, more details are provided in Chart 9. As it turned out, if a family member posted something inappropriate or offensive on social media, the

majority of our respondents (129; 58 %) confronted the family member directly, but in private; they did not try to criticize the family member publicly. An undeniably positive finding is that only 17 respondents (7 %) reported that they ignored such content unnoticed, and only 4 respondents (2 %) unfriended or blocked such a family member. The remaining one-third of respondents (33 %) reported that none of their loved ones had yet posted any offensive content on social media and so they were not forced to respond in any way. However, if something similar were to happen, they would react sensitively with consideration, certainly not impulsively.

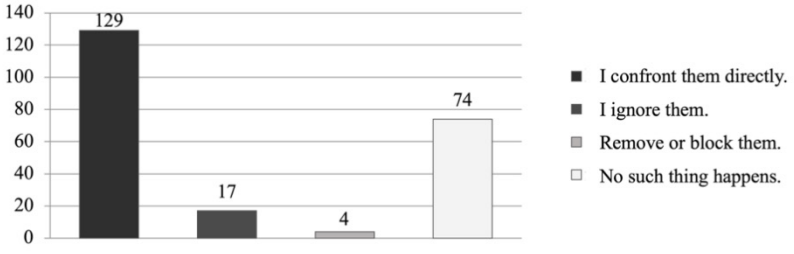

Figure 9. Reaction when offensive content is published

Nowadays, it's important to try to strike a ***balance between time*** spent online and time spent with your family. Most of our respondents are aware of this, as shown in Figure 10, as 202 of them (90.2 %) put their family first, followed by social networks themselves in the "popularity" ranking. However, for 22 respondents (9.8 %) it is social networks that are the priority.

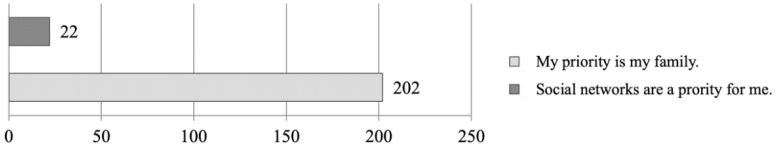

Figure 10. Spending leisure time in the context of family and social networks

In the next segment of the research, we focused on ***verifying the research hypotheses***, focusing on students' leisure time use through social networking sites.

In the first hypothesis, we hypothesized that students who spend more time on social networking sites during the workweek would also spend more time on social networking sites during the weekend. We used Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient to evaluate this, and the results of the correlation analysis for

the examined relationship between the amount of time spent on social networking sites during the workweek and during the weekend indicated a moderate, direct, highly statistically significant correlation (R = 0.5611; p = 0.0000 < 0.05). In the context of the data in Table 1, we can confirm our hypothesis that students who spend more time on social networking sites during the workweek also spend more time on social networking sites during the weekend.

Table 1. Time spent on social media (work week & weekend)

Variables (*Pair of Variables*): Working week & Weekend	*Correlations are significant at: MD pairwise deleted* p < ,05000		
	Valid (Valid) *(N)*	**Spearman correlation coefficient** (Spearman coefficient correlation) *(R)*	**Significance level** *(p-value)*
Time spent on SN during the working week & at the weekend	224	**0,561070**	**0,000000**

Explanatory note: SN (social networks)

These findings show that college students who spend more time on social media during the work week also spend more time online on the weekends, despite the fact that many of them return home to their families on the weekends.

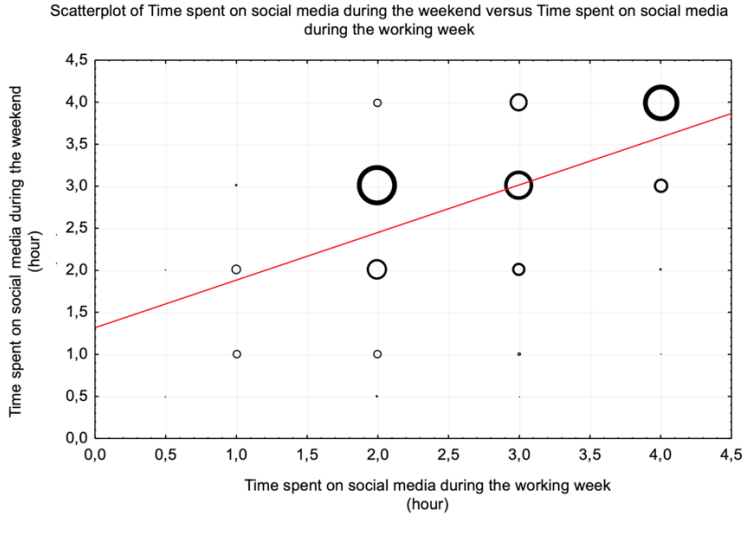

Figure 11. Time spent on social media (work week and weekend)

In the final segment of the research, the ***second hypothesis*** explored whether there is a relationship between the amount of time students spend on social media and how often they interact on social media with those closest to them. In this case, the results of the statistical analysis showed (Table 2) that there is virtually no relationship between the time spent on social networking sites and the frequency with which students communicate with their family. The value of Sperman's correlation coefficient R = - 0.04597 (p = 0.49364 > 0.05) indicated a very weak, inverse, statistically insignificant correlation between the variables studied. The negative value of the correlation coefficient to some extent only confirmed the fact that students who spend more time on social networks communicate "online" with their closest ones even slightly less often than those students who stay on social networks only for a shorter time.

Table 2. Time spent on social media (work week & weekend)

Variables (*Pair of Variables*): Time on SN & Frequency of communication	**Correlations are significant at: MD pairwise deleted p < ,05000**		
	Valid (Valid) *(N)*	**Spearman correlation coefficient** (Spearman coefficient correlation) *(R)*	**Significance level** *(p-value)*
Time spent on SN & Frequency of communication with family	224	-0,045970	0,493644

Explanation: SN (social networks)

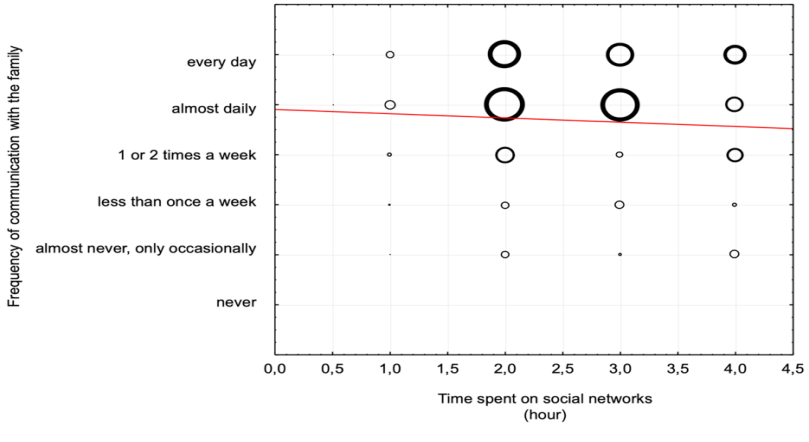

Figure 12. Frequency of communication with family and time spent on social networks

Discussion

Reflecting on our findings, we can conclude that the families we studied actively use various social networking platforms in their household. The respondents' statements show that they use social networking sites such as Instagram, Youtube and Facebook most frequently, which does not contradict the findings in the theoretical part of the study. Another interesting, but not surprising finding is the fact that the social network – TikTok – comes to the fore, which is used by more than half of the surveyed respondents. That the interest in social networking continues to grow is confirmed by the findings of the Electronic Transactions Development Authority (2016) of the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ETDA) that the use of the Internet and social networking sites continues to expand, while the number of users of intergenerational communication, especially among children and the elderly, has also grown. When examining the percentage of use of online social networking platforms by age group, it was found that online communication has increased in every group, and this trend is set to continue.

As a follow-up, we investigated how often students use social networking sites during the workweek compared to the weekend. Considering the workweek in general as the time when college students actively participate in classes, it is alarming that more than half of the surveyed students spend 2 – 3 hours a day on social networking sites, and more than a fifth of the students spend up to 4 hours a day or more on social networking sites. While the number of students who spend their free time using social networking sites during the weekend is decreasing, the number of students who spend 3 hours a day or even 4 or more hours a day on social networking sites is increasing. The above findings raise the issue of students' academic performance as well as the issue of leisure time not only for students themselves but also in the context of family leisure time.

Students perceive the importance and positive role of social networks in strengthening family ties, especially in the context of family separation (whether due to study or work commitments). In the context of modern social dynamics, the use of social networks can be a means of maintaining and further developing family relationships, but only if they are used purposefully and intelligently. Our findings are consistent with Coyne et al.'s (2014) research findings that social networking can be a tool for bonding -phone calls, messages, shared viewing) or a tool for documenting family life – photos, videos, blogs, experiences.

When it comes to shared content on social networks, personal updates, especially in the form of photos and videos, as well as information about various important events, are among the most frequent. In terms of sharing frequency, according to our findings, there are two groups of students, on the one hand, those who do not share any content on social networks, or only sporadically. The second group consists of students (31 %) who share content on social networks

on a regular weekly frequency (at least once a week or more). We observed a similar situation when it comes to family members sharing different content, with up to 25 % of them sharing content on social networks at a weekly frequency. However, it is alarming that despite the high frequency of content sharing on social media, discussions in family settings are rather sporadic. On the other hand, it is an undeniably positive finding that more than half of students (58 %) reach out to their loved ones directly if they share something offensive or inappropriate on social media.

Social networking can cause conflicts in the family environment, whether due to time spent on social networks or differing views on the appropriateness of shared content, as well as the use of social networking as a communication tool. Almost half of the respondents (43 %) reported that they had experienced conflicts in their families in the context of their use of social networking sites. In the same way, also according to the findings of Çetin (2013), social networks affect family communication, due to the fact that virtual communication limits face-to-face communication.

Correlation analysis revealed a moderate relationship between time spent on social networking sites during the workweek and the weekend, indicating that those who spend more time on social networking sites during the workweek also spend more time in the online space during the weekends, despite the fact that many just return home to their families during the weekend. Conversely, no significant association was found between time spent online and frequency of family communication. This finding suggests that while social networking may be a means of communication, it is not a prerequisite for more frequent communication with family, nor does it improve the quality of family interactions.

In conclusion, a balanced and adequate use of social networks is essential not only for healthy functioning and leisure time in young adults, but also in the context of maintaining harmonious relationships in the family environment. A conscious effort to limit the time spent online and a focus on direct interaction can mitigate the negative consequences of excessive use. Although social networks can be a kind of 'ally' in terms of communication on the part of families and university students, it should not be forgotten that social networks cannot completely replace real, face-to-face encounters and communication within the family.

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