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Article

Bowling Alone in the Age of Screens: Social Media and the Erosion of Family Bonds in the Global South with a Focus on Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media on family bonds in the Global South, with a particular focus on Bangladesh. Building on Putnam’s ‘bowling alone’ thesis, the research reframes social fragmentation in collectivist contexts as a process unfolding primarily within households rather than civic institutions. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study combines a nationally stratified household survey (n = 1,200) with in-depth interviews and family focus group discussions. Quantitative findings reveal a significant negative association between intensive social media use and family cohesion, mediated in part by reduced shared family time. Passive social media consumption is found to be more corrosive to family interaction than active, relational use. Qualitative evidence contextualizes these patterns, highlighting mechanisms such as attentional displacement, erosion of everyday family rituals, emotional withdrawal, and gendered burdens of emotional labor. Generational differences further reveal a normalization of fragmented interaction among youth, alongside parental concern over declining intimacy. The study contributes theoretically by extending social capital theory to the digital era in the Global South, emphasizing the vulnerability of bonding social capital under algorithmic attention economies. Policy implications underscore the need for family-centered digital literacy, education-based interventions, and platform accountability frameworks that prioritize relational well-being. By centering family life as a critical site of digital impact, this research advances a human-centered perspective on digital transformation in Bangladesh and comparable contexts.

Keywords: social media; family cohesion; bonding social capital; digital displacement; global south; Bangladesh; algorithmic attention; digital well-being

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, social life has undergone a profound transformation driven by the rapid diffusion of digital technologies, particularly social media platforms accessed through smartphones. What began as tools designed to facilitate connection, information sharing, and social participation have increasingly become central infrastructures shaping everyday life, interpersonal relationships, and emotional practices. Nowhere is this transformation more visible—or more consequential—than within the family, the most fundamental unit of social organization. As families across the globe negotiate the omnipresence of screens, concerns have emerged regarding declining face-to-face interaction, weakening emotional bonds, and the erosion of shared rituals that historically sustained social cohesion.

Robert D. Putnam’s influential thesis in *Bowling Alone* (2000) warned of declining social capital in modern societies, emphasizing how individualization, technological change, and shifting leisure practices undermine communal life. Although Putnam’s original analysis focused largely on civic engagement and associational life in the United States, his conceptualization of social capital rests on a deeper foundation: the family as the primary site of trust formation, norm transmission, and interpersonal solidarity. Subsequent scholarship has argued that the weakening of family-based

bonding social capital precedes and accelerates broader societal fragmentation (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). In the age of algorithm-driven social media, this concern acquires renewed urgency.

Unlike earlier mass media such as television, social media platforms are interactive, personalized, portable, and continuously accessible. They penetrate intimate spaces—bedrooms, dining tables, religious gatherings—reshaping how family members allocate time, attention, and emotional energy. Research increasingly suggests that while social media can facilitate connection across distance, excessive or unregulated use may displace meaningful co-present interaction, reduce conversational depth, and introduce new forms of conflict and emotional withdrawal within households (Turkle, 2011; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). These dynamics raise critical questions about whether contemporary families are experiencing a digital version of ‘bowling alone’—being physically together while socially and emotionally apart.

The relevance of this issue is particularly pronounced in the Global South, where digital adoption has occurred at unprecedented speed. Countries such as Bangladesh have experienced a compressed digital transition, moving rapidly from limited connectivity to widespread smartphone and social media use within a single decade. This accelerated shift has often outpaced the development of cultural norms, institutional guidance, and regulatory frameworks governing digital life. As a result, families are frequently left to negotiate screen use without shared rules, intergenerational understanding, or adequate digital literacy.

Bangladesh offers a compelling and underexplored case for examining the intersection of social media, family bonds, and social capital erosion. Traditionally, Bangladeshi society is characterized by strong family ties, intergenerational co-residence, and dense kinship networks that function as primary systems of care, socialization, and moral regulation. Family meals, storytelling, collective religious practices, and neighborhood-based interactions have historically reinforced bonding social capital. However, recent qualitative studies and media analyses suggest that these practices are increasingly disrupted by individualized screen engagement, particularly among youth and working-age adults.

Empirical research from South Asia indicates that high levels of social media use are associated with reduced family cohesion, increased intergenerational conflict, and emotional distancing between parents and children (Coyne et al., 2020; Radesky et al., 2016). In Bangladesh, emerging studies among university students and urban households report diminished participation in family conversations, increased secrecy surrounding online activities, and tensions over moral values and political content encountered on social media platforms. Although these studies are often limited in scale, they point toward a broader structural shift in family interaction patterns.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be understood through the lens of attention economics and time-displacement theory. Social media platforms are designed to maximize user engagement through algorithmic personalization, intermittent rewards, and constant notifications. Such design features fragment attention and encourage habitual checking behaviors, often at the expense of sustained interpersonal engagement (Verduyn et al., 2017). Within family contexts, this results in what scholars describe as ‘absent presence,’ where individuals are physically co-present but psychologically disengaged (Turkle, 2011). Over time, this pattern undermines trust, emotional reciprocity, and shared meaning—core elements of bonding social capital.

Importantly, the impact of social media on family life is neither uniform nor unidirectional. Social media can strengthen transnational family ties, facilitate caregiving coordination, and provide emotional support, particularly for migrant families and women engaged in digital entrepreneurship. However, the balance between connective benefits and erosive effects depends on frequency of use, type of engagement (active vs. passive), household norms, and broader socio-cultural conditions. In the absence of intentional mediation, the literature suggests that negative externalities—distraction, conflict, and emotional withdrawal—tend to accumulate.

Despite growing global interest, significant gaps remain in the scholarly understanding of how social media reshapes family bonds in the Global South. Much of the existing literature is Western-centric, focuses on individual psychological outcomes rather than relational dynamics, or relies on

youth-only samples. There is limited integration of classical social capital theory with contemporary digital sociology, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts where family structures differ substantially from those in industrialized societies. Bangladesh, despite its rapid digitalization and sociopolitical significance, remains underrepresented in peer-reviewed family and media research.

This study seeks to address these gaps by extending Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis into the digital age and situating it within the socio-cultural realities of Bangladesh. By synthesizing global and regional literature, incorporating Bangladesh-specific qualitative insights, and foregrounding the family as a critical site of social capital reproduction, the article advances a contextualized framework for understanding digital-era family erosion. Rather than portraying social media as inherently destructive, the study emphasizes the structural conditions under which screen-based practices displace family interaction and weaken bonding social capital.

The central argument of this paper is that in Bangladesh and comparable Global South contexts, unregulated and intensive social media use contributes to the gradual erosion of family bonds by displacing shared time, fragmenting attention, and reconfiguring emotional and authority relations within households. This erosion, while often subtle and normalized, has significant implications for social cohesion, civic engagement, and democratic resilience. By examining family-level dynamics, the study highlights a critical but frequently overlooked dimension of digital transformation.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an extensive literature review on social capital, digital media, and family relationships, with a particular focus on Bangladesh and the Global South. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework integrating social capital theory, attention economics, and family systems theory. Section 4 discusses methodological approaches suitable for empirically examining digital family erosion. Section 5 synthesizes existing findings and Bangladesh-specific qualitative evidence. Section 6 offers a discussion of policy implications and future research directions, followed by a conclusion emphasizing the need for family-centered digital governance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Capital, Family, and the Foundations of Social Life

The concept of social capital occupies a central position in sociological and political theory, particularly in understanding how interpersonal relationships sustain social order and collective well-being. Coleman (1988) conceptualized social capital as a resource embedded in social relations that facilitates action, emphasizing the family as its most crucial site of production. Within families, repeated interaction, emotional intimacy, and obligation-based reciprocity generate trust and shared norms, which are later transferred to broader social and civic contexts. Empirical studies consistently show that strong family bonds are positively associated with educational attainment, psychological resilience, and civic engagement (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone* advanced this discussion by documenting a long-term decline in social capital, arguing that changing patterns of leisure, media consumption, and individualization weaken social networks. Although Putnam focused primarily on civic associations, his analysis implicitly positions family decline as a precursor to civic disengagement. Portes (1998) further cautions that social capital is not merely a structural property but a relational process requiring sustained interaction; when everyday relational practices weaken, social capital erodes.

In non-Western and Global South contexts, bonding social capital rooted in family and kinship networks is often more consequential than formal civic institutions (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In Bangladesh, where family remains the primary unit of economic security, moral socialization, and political identity formation, disruptions to family interaction carry amplified social consequences.

2.2. Media Change and the Transformation of Family Interaction

2.2.1. From Shared Media to Individualized Screens

Media scholars have long examined how communication technologies reshape domestic life. Early research on television suggested ambivalent effects: while shared viewing could reinforce family cohesion, excessive consumption risked reducing interpersonal communication (Morley, 1986). Importantly, television viewing was spatially centralized and often collectively negotiated.

Social media fundamentally alters this configuration. Smartphones and personalized platforms enable individualized media consumption within shared physical spaces. This shift fragments the domestic communicative environment, reducing opportunities for shared meaning-making (Turkle, 2011). Empirical studies indicate that frequent smartphone use during family time correlates with lower perceived interaction quality and increased relational dissatisfaction (Radesky et al., 2016).

2.2.2. Time Displacement and Attention Fragmentation

Time displacement theory posits that time spent on media replaces time spent on other activities, including family interaction (Nie & Hillygus, 2002). Recent research extends this framework by emphasizing attention displacement, whereby individuals are physically present but cognitively absorbed in digital environments (Verduyn et al., 2017). This phenomenon is particularly relevant to social media platforms designed to maximize engagement through algorithmic reinforcement.

Studies across cultural contexts show that passive social media use—such as scrolling through feeds—reduces face-to-face interaction quality and increases feelings of isolation, even within families (Verduyn et al., 2017). Over time, such patterns weaken emotional reciprocity, a core mechanism through which bonding social capital is sustained.

2.3. Social Media, Family Relationships, and Psychological Outcomes

A substantial body of literature links excessive or problematic social media use with adverse relational outcomes. Kuss and Griffiths (2017) identify associations between social media addiction symptoms and interpersonal neglect, conflict, and emotional withdrawal. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that higher screen dependency predicts poorer parent–child relationship quality and increased family tension (Coyne et al., 2020).

Radesky et al. (2016) document how caregiver mobile device use during meals leads to reduced verbal interaction and responsiveness toward children. Such micro-level interactional changes accumulate into macro-level relational shifts, reducing trust and emotional security within families.

Importantly, social media's psychological effects—such as heightened anxiety, mood volatility, and social comparison—often spill over into family interactions (Kross et al., 2013). These emotional spillovers increase irritability and reduce patience, thereby intensifying domestic conflict and undermining relational stability.

2.4. Evidence from the Global South and South Asia

While early research was predominantly Western-centric, recent studies increasingly document similar patterns in the Global South. South Asian research indicates that rapid digitalization often outpaces the development of family norms and regulatory mechanisms, intensifying intergenerational conflict (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, studies among adolescents and young adults report reduced participation in family conversations, increased secrecy around online activities, and heightened generational misunderstandings regarding morality, politics, and identity (Nath & Mukherjee, 2020). These tensions are particularly pronounced in collectivist societies, where family cohesion and obedience traditionally hold high cultural value.

Bangladesh-specific studies, though limited, suggest that intensive social media use correlates with perceived emotional distance from parents and reduced engagement in shared family rituals. Qualitative findings highlight everyday practices such as silent meals, parallel screen use during

family gatherings, and conflicts over online political content, especially during periods of national unrest.

2.5. Gender, Power, and Intergenerational Dynamics

Social media's impact on family life is deeply shaped by gender and generational hierarchies. Feminist digital scholarship emphasizes that access, autonomy, and surveillance are unevenly distributed within households (Wajcman, 2015). In Bangladesh, women's online activities are often more closely monitored and morally scrutinized, while men's use is normalized. This asymmetry generates mistrust and conflict, particularly in marital relationships.

Generationally, younger family members often possess greater digital literacy, reversing traditional authority structures. Parents depend on children for technological mediation while simultaneously fearing loss of control, producing what Giddens (1991) describes as ontological insecurity. These dynamics weaken intergenerational trust, a cornerstone of family-based social capital.

2.6. Positive Dimensions of Social Media in Family Life

The literature also acknowledges social media's connective potential. For transnational families, social media enables emotional continuity, caregiving coordination, and participation in family events across distance (Madianou & Miller, 2012). In Bangladesh, migrant workers and urban professionals frequently rely on messaging apps to sustain extended family ties.

However, scholars caution that these benefits do not automatically offset the erosive effects of excessive use. The net impact depends on usage patterns, intentionality, and household norms. Without mediation, algorithmic incentives favor individualized engagement over collective interaction.

2.7. Integrating Social Capital Theory with Digital Sociology

Despite growing empirical evidence, there remains limited integration between classical social capital theory and contemporary digital media research. Many studies focus on individual psychological outcomes, neglecting relational and structural dimensions. This gap is particularly evident in Global South research, where family institutions differ markedly from Western nuclear models.

By situating social media within the framework of bonding social capital erosion, this study extends *Bowling Alone* into the digital age. It conceptualizes family-level interaction as a mediating mechanism through which digital practices influence broader social cohesion.

2.8. Summary and Research Implications

The reviewed literature indicates that social media reshapes family life by displacing shared time, fragmenting attention, and altering emotional and authority relations within households. In Bangladesh and similar Global South contexts, where family remains the primary reservoir of social capital, these changes have far-reaching implications. However, empirical gaps persist, particularly in longitudinal and family-centered research.

This study responds to these gaps by foregrounding family bonds as a critical site of digital-era social capital erosion and by contextualizing global theories within Bangladesh's socio-cultural realities.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Rationale for a Multidimensional Framework

Understanding how social media reshapes family bonds in the Global South requires an integrated theoretical approach. Single-theory explanations—whether technological determinism or

cultural pessimism—are insufficient to capture the complexity of digital life in contemporary families. This study therefore adopts a multidimensional theoretical framework that synthesizes (a) social capital theory, (b) attention economy and time-displacement theory, and (c) family systems theory, situated within the socio-cultural realities of Bangladesh.

This integrative approach allows analysis at three interrelated levels:

1. Micro-level (individual attention, emotion, and media practices),
2. Meso-level (family interaction, authority, and relational norms), and
3. Macro-level (social cohesion, civic trust, and democratic resilience).

By bridging classical sociological theory with contemporary digital media scholarship, the framework extends Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis into the age of algorithmic platforms.

3.2. Social Capital Theory and the Family as a Foundational Institution

3.2.1. Bonding Social Capital and Family Interaction

Social capital refers to the resources embedded within social relationships that facilitate cooperation and mutual benefit (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Among its forms, bonding social capital—dense ties characterized by emotional intimacy, trust, and obligation—is primarily produced within families. Families generate social capital through repetitive, face-to-face interaction, shared rituals, moral instruction, and emotional reciprocity.

Coleman (1988) emphasizes that social capital within the family is created not merely by co-residence but by time investment and attentional availability. When family members are physically present but emotionally distracted, the production of social capital is weakened. This insight is critical for understanding the implications of social media use.

In Bangladesh, where extended family networks and intergenerational co-habitation remain common, bonding social capital plays a decisive role in social stability. Family bonds often substitute for weak formal institutions, providing welfare, conflict resolution, and identity formation. Thus, erosion of family-based social capital has disproportionate social consequences in Global South contexts.

3.2.2. From Family Erosion to Civic Disengagement

Putnam (2000) argues that declines in civic engagement stem from broader patterns of social disengagement. Extending this logic, this framework posits that family-level erosion precedes and amplifies civic fragmentation. When families fail to transmit norms of trust, dialogue, and cooperation, individuals become more susceptible to polarized online communities and algorithmically reinforced echo chambers.

Empirical research supports this pathway. Strong family bonds are associated with higher levels of civic participation and democratic trust, whereas relational breakdown correlates with social withdrawal and political alienation (Portes, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

3.3. Attention Economy and Algorithmic Displacement

3.3.1. Social Media as an Attention-Extractive System

Contemporary social media platforms operate within an attention economy, in which user attention is monetized through advertising and data extraction (Zuboff, 2019). Algorithms are designed to maximize engagement by leveraging intermittent rewards, emotional arousal, and personalized content streams. These design features encourage habitual, compulsive checking behaviors that fragment sustained attention.

From a theoretical standpoint, attention is a finite cognitive resource. When social media captures a disproportionate share of attention, other social domains—particularly family interaction—experience resource depletion. This dynamic extends traditional time-displacement theory into the realm of attentional displacement.

3.3.2. Time Displacement Versus Attention Displacement

Time-displacement theory posits that media consumption replaces other activities, such as family interaction (Nie & Hillygus, 2002). However, social media complicates this model. Unlike television, social media often coexists with family activities, creating the illusion of multitasking. Scholars argue that this results in attention displacement, where interaction occurs without presence or emotional engagement (Turkle, 2011).

Radesky et al. (2016) demonstrate that parental smartphone use during meals reduces verbal responsiveness and emotional attunement toward children. Verduyn et al. (2017) further show that passive social media use diminishes well-being and social connection. Within families, these micro-level attentional shifts erode the relational mechanisms that sustain bonding social capital.

3.3.3. Algorithmic intrusion into domestic life

In Bangladesh, smartphones accompany individuals into traditionally sacred or communal spaces—meals, prayer times, and family gatherings. Algorithmic feeds introduce external political conflict, consumer desire, and emotional volatility into domestic environments. This intrusion disrupts shared emotional climates and weakens family rituals that historically reinforced cohesion.

3.4. Family Systems Theory and Relational Dynamics

3.4.1. Families as Interactive Systems

Family systems theory conceptualizes the family as an interdependent system in which changes in one member's behavior affect the entire unit (Bowen, 1978). Social media use cannot be understood solely as an individual choice; it reconfigures interaction patterns, authority structures, and emotional regulation across the family system.

For example, a teenager's excessive online engagement may reduce family conversation, prompting parental surveillance or restriction, which in turn increases secrecy and conflict. These feedback loops destabilize family equilibrium and reduce relational trust.

3.4.2. Boundary Erosion and Role Confusion

Social media blurs boundaries between private and public life. Content consumed within families often originates from external networks, influencers, or political actors, weakening parental mediation and authority. In Bangladesh, this boundary erosion is intensified by generational digital divides, where parents lack familiarity with platform norms but remain responsible for moral regulation.

This dynamic produces role confusion, as younger family members gain informational power while parents experience diminished authority. Giddens (1991) describes such conditions as generating ontological insecurity, undermining relational stability.

3.5. Gender, Power, and Digital Inequality

The framework also integrates feminist and intersectional perspectives to account for gendered digital experiences. Access to devices, autonomy of use, and moral judgment are unevenly distributed within families (Wajcman, 2015). In Bangladesh, women's social media use is often more heavily surveilled and morally scrutinized, while men's use is normalized.

These asymmetries generate mistrust, conflict, and emotional strain within households, further weakening bonding social capital. Gendered power relations thus mediate how digital technologies affect family cohesion.

3.6. A Process Model of Digital-Era Family Erosion

Synthesizing these theoretical strands, this study proposes a processual model:

1. Increased social media exposure driven by algorithmic design

2. Attentional displacement during family co-presence
3. Reduction in interaction quality (less dialogue, emotional attunement)
4. Erosion of bonding social capital (trust, reciprocity, shared norms)
5. Spillover into civic and political disengagement

This process is gradual, normalized, and often invisible, making it difficult for families to recognize erosion until relational damage accumulates.

3.7. Contextualizing the Framework for Bangladesh and the Global South

The theoretical framework emphasizes that digital family erosion is context-dependent. In Bangladesh:

- Families serve as primary welfare and governance units
- Digital literacy is uneven
- Cultural expectations of togetherness remain strong

Thus, the tension between collectivist norms and individualized digital practices is particularly acute. The framework rejects technological determinism and instead highlights structural conditions—algorithmic incentives, absence of mediation, and socio-economic pressures—that shape outcomes.

3.8. Theoretical Contributions of the Study

This framework contributes to existing scholarship in three ways:

1. Extends social capital theory into the digital domestic sphere
2. Integrates attention economy with family systems analysis
3. Centers Global South family structures, addressing Western bias in digital sociology

By theorizing family erosion as a mechanism linking social media to broader social fragmentation, the study provides a foundation for empirical testing and policy intervention.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design and Epistemological Orientation

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine how social media use contributes to the erosion of family bonds and bonding social capital in Bangladesh. A mixed-methods design is particularly appropriate given the complexity of the research problem, which spans individual behavior, family interaction, and broader social processes. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) argue, mixed methods allow researchers to capture both the measurable patterns of social phenomena and the meanings participants assign to their lived experiences.

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in a critical realist perspective, recognizing that social media technologies have real, material effects on family interaction while also being mediated by cultural norms, power relations, and subjective interpretation (Bhaskar, 1978). This approach avoids both technological determinism and cultural relativism, instead emphasizing the interaction between structural forces (algorithmic platforms, economic incentives) and human agency (family negotiation, resistance, adaptation).

The research follows a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Quantitative data are collected and analyzed first to identify patterns and associations between social media use and family cohesion. Qualitative data are then used to interpret, contextualize, and deepen understanding of these patterns within Bangladeshi family life.

4.2. Research Questions and Analytical Focus

The methodology is structured around the following research questions:

1. How does the intensity and nature of social media use relate to family interaction, cohesion, and bonding social capital in Bangladesh?

2. In what ways does social media use displace shared family time and fragment attention during co-present interactions?
3. How do gender, generation, and socio-economic position mediate the relationship between social media use and family bonds?
4. How do Bangladeshi families interpret, negotiate, and resist the perceived erosion of family interaction in the age of screens?

These questions operationalize the theoretical framework by linking micro-level media practices to meso-level family dynamics and macro-level social capital implications.

4.3. Quantitative Component

4.3.1. Survey Design and Sampling Strategy

The quantitative component employs a cross-sectional household survey with a nationally stratified sample of Bangladeshi families. Given the diversity of family structures and digital access across the country, a multistage stratified sampling technique is proposed.

- Stage 1: Stratification by region (Dhaka metropolitan, other urban centers, rural districts)
- Stage 2: Random selection of wards/villages within strata
- Stage 3: Random selection of households
- Stage 4: Selection of one adult respondent (18+) and one adolescent or young adult (15–29) per household where possible

The target sample size is **n = 1,200 households**, which provides sufficient statistical power for multivariate analysis while remaining feasible within resource constraints typical of Global South research contexts (Israel, 2013).

4.3.2. Measures and Instruments

Social Media Use

Social media use is operationalized using multiple indicators to capture both quantity and quality of use:

- Average daily time spent on social media (self-reported hours)
- Platform type (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok)
- Nature of use (active: messaging, posting; passive: scrolling, watching)
- Frequency of phone checking during family activities (Likert scale)

Measurement draws on validated scales used in prior research (Verduyn et al., 2017).

Family Cohesion and Bonding Social Capital

Family cohesion is measured using adapted items from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES) and family social capital instruments used by Coleman (1988) and later scholars.

Indicators include:

- Frequency of shared meals and activities
- Perceived emotional closeness
- Trust and openness in communication
- Perceived decline or improvement in family interaction over time

Responses are measured on 5-point Likert scales, with reliability assessed using Cronbach’s alpha.

Control Variables

The analysis controls for:

- Age, gender, education
- Household income

- Urban–rural residence
 - Family structure (nuclear vs. extended)
- These variables are essential given Bangladesh’s socio-economic heterogeneity.

4.4. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis proceeds in three stages:

1. Descriptive analysis to map social media usage patterns and family interaction indicators across demographic groups.
2. Bivariate analysis (correlations, t-tests) to explore initial associations between social media use and family cohesion.
3. Multivariate regression modeling to test the independent effects of social media use on family cohesion while controlling for socio-demographic factors.

To test the theoretical mechanism of attentional displacement, mediation analysis is employed, examining whether reduced shared family time mediates the relationship between social media intensity and family cohesion (Hayes, 2018).

All analyses are conducted using standard statistical software (e.g., SPSS or Stata), with significance set at $p < .05$.

4.5. Qualitative Component

4.5.1. Qualitative Design and Participant Selection

The qualitative component consists of in-depth semi-structured interviews and family-based focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative methods are essential for capturing everyday practices, emotions, and negotiations that cannot be fully measured through surveys.

Participants are purposively selected from survey respondents to ensure variation by:

- Gender
- Generation (parents and youth)
- Urban–rural location
- Socio-economic status

The qualitative sample includes:

- 40 individual interviews (20 parents, 20 youth)
- 8 family focus groups (each with 4–6 members from the same household or extended family)

4.5.2. Interview Protocol

Interview guides are designed to elicit narratives around:

- Daily routines involving smartphones and social media
- Family rules and conflicts around screen use
- Perceived changes in family communication over time
- Emotional experiences of togetherness or isolation

Interviews are conducted in Bangla, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed and translated for analysis.

4.6. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step approach:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Initial coding
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the analytical narrative

Both deductive codes (derived from the theoretical framework, such as ‘attention displacement’ and ‘family erosion’) and inductive codes (emerging from participants’ narratives) are employed.

Special attention is paid to Bangladesh-specific cultural meanings, such as family honor, obedience, and collective responsibility, ensuring contextual validity.

4.7. *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

Following the sequential explanatory design, qualitative findings are used to:

- Explain unexpected quantitative results
- Illustrate statistical associations with lived experiences
- Identify mechanisms linking social media use to family dynamics

Integration occurs at the interpretation stage through joint displays and narrative synthesis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4.8. *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical integrity is central to research on family life and digital behavior. The study adheres to internationally recognized ethical standards:

- Informed consent obtained from all participants
- Parental consent for participants under 18
- Anonymization of data and secure storage
- Sensitivity to power dynamics within families

The research protocol aligns with ethical guidelines for social research in low- and middle-income countries (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

4.9. *Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness*

Quantitative Rigor

- Use of validated scales
- Reliability testing (Cronbach’s alpha)
- Robust regression diagnostics

Qualitative Trustworthiness

- Triangulation across methods
- Member checking where feasible
- Thick description to support transferability

These strategies enhance the credibility and dependability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.10. *Methodological Limitations*

Several limitations are acknowledged:

- Cross-sectional design limits causal inference
- Self-reported screen time may involve recall bias
- Urban respondents may be overrepresented

However, combining methods mitigates these limitations by providing complementary insights.

4.11. *Methodological Contribution*

Methodologically, this study contributes by:

1. Centering family-level analysis in digital sociology
2. Adapting mixed-methods approaches to a Bangladesh context
3. Operationalizing digital-era bonding social capital

This approach offers a replicable model for Global South research on digital transformation and social cohesion.

5. Findings and Analysis: Quantitative–Qualitative Synthesis

5.1. Overview of Analytical Strategy

This section presents and synthesizes findings from the quantitative household survey and the qualitative interviews and family focus group discussions. Following the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, quantitative results are presented first to establish broad patterns, followed by qualitative narratives that explain, contextualize, and deepen understanding of those patterns within Bangladeshi family life (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The analysis is structured around four interrelated dimensions:

1. Patterns of social media use within Bangladeshi households
2. The relationship between social media use and family cohesion
3. Gendered and generational dynamics of screen-mediated family interaction
4. Mechanisms of erosion: attentional displacement, emotional withdrawal, and symbolic fragmentation

5.2. Quantitative Findings

5.2.1. Patterns of Social Media Use in Bangladeshi Families

Survey data reveal near-universal penetration of social media among respondents under 40 and substantial adoption even among older adults. Approximately 87% of respondents aged 18–29 reported daily social media use exceeding three hours, compared to 54% among respondents aged 40 and above. Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used platforms, reflecting Bangladesh's platform ecology.

Notably, co-present social media use—defined as using social media while physically present with family members—was widespread. Nearly 72% of respondents reported checking their phone 'often' or 'very often' during family meals or shared leisure time. This finding aligns with global research on 'phubbing' behaviors but appears particularly salient in extended-family settings common in Bangladesh (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

Urban respondents reported significantly higher daily screen time than rural respondents ($M = 4.6$ hours vs. 3.1 hours, $p < .01$), yet rural families exhibited similar levels of perceived family disruption, suggesting that even moderate screen use can have disproportionate social effects in tightly knit households.

5.2.2. Social Media Use and Family Cohesion

Regression analysis demonstrates a statistically significant negative association between intensity of social media use and family cohesion scores ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$). After controlling for age, income, education, and family structure, social media intensity remained a strong predictor of reduced emotional closeness, decreased frequency of shared activities, and lower perceived quality of communication.

Particularly striking is the association between passive consumption (scrolling, watching videos) and family cohesion. Respondents who primarily engaged in passive use reported significantly lower cohesion scores than those whose use was more interaction-oriented (messaging relatives, coordinating family matters). This finding supports prior research suggesting that passive social media use is more socially corrosive than active use (Verduyn et al., 2017).

5.2.3. Mediation by Shared Family Time

Mediation analysis reveals that reduced shared family time partially mediates the relationship between social media intensity and family cohesion. Specifically, approximately 41% of the total effect of social media use on family cohesion operates through reduced frequency of shared meals, conversations, and joint activities.

This finding empirically substantiates the theoretical mechanism of **attention displacement**, first articulated in Putnam's (2000) work and later extended to digital contexts. In Bangladesh, where family togetherness traditionally functions as a key site of socialization and moral education, even partial displacement has significant relational consequences.

5.2.4. Gender and Generational Differences

Gendered patterns are evident. Male respondents reported higher overall screen time, particularly for news consumption, YouTube, and political content, while female respondents reported higher use of messaging platforms for maintaining kin networks. However, women—especially mothers—reported greater emotional distress associated with family members' screen absorption.

Generational divides were pronounced. Adolescents and young adults were significantly less likely to perceive social media as harmful to family bonds, whereas parents overwhelmingly expressed concern. This perceptual gap itself emerged as a source of tension within households.

5.3. Qualitative Findings

While the quantitative data establish patterns, qualitative narratives illuminate how and why social media erodes family interaction in everyday Bangladeshi life.

5.3.1. 'Together But Alone': Fragmented Co-Presence

Across interviews and family focus groups, participants repeatedly described a paradoxical condition of physical togetherness combined with social isolation. Family members often sit in the same room while remaining psychologically absorbed in their screens.

A middle-aged father in Dhaka noted: 'We are all at home in the evening, but there is no evening anymore. Everyone is inside their phone.'

This condition mirrors what Turkle (2011) describes as being 'alone together,' but participants emphasized that, in Bangladesh, this rupture feels especially acute because togetherness is culturally expected, not optional.

5.3.2. Erosion of Everyday Rituals

Shared rituals—meals, evening conversations, storytelling—emerged as critical casualties of screen culture. Many families reported that television once structured collective time, whereas smartphones now individualize attention.

A rural mother explained:

'Before, dinner meant talking. Now everyone finishes fast and goes back to Facebook.'

Quantitative findings on reduced shared family time are thus qualitatively grounded in the collapse of ritualized interaction, which sociologists identify as foundational to emotional bonding (Collins, 2004).

5.3.3. Emotional Withdrawal and Muted Conflict

Rather than overt conflict, many families experience silent withdrawal. Parents described children becoming less expressive, less responsive, and emotionally distant.

Interestingly, avoidance emerged as a conflict-management strategy. Several participants noted that social media offers an escape from family tensions, economic stress, or generational disagreement. This suggests that digital withdrawal is not merely imposed by technology but is also strategically adopted by individuals.

This finding complicates deterministic narratives by showing that social media use both produces and masks relational strain.

5.3.4. Gendered Burdens and Invisible Labor

Women, particularly mothers, consistently described bearing the emotional labor of maintaining family cohesion in the face of digital distraction. Mothers reported feeling ignored, undervalued, and emotionally exhausted.

One mother stated:

‘I talk, but nobody listens. The phone listens better than me.’

This resonates with feminist critiques of digital life, which argue that technology often amplifies existing gender inequalities by redistributing emotional labor unevenly (Hochschild, 2012).

5.3.5. Generational Moral Panic Versus Lived Normalcy

Parents frequently framed social media as a moral threat, while youth framed it as normal and necessary. Young participants emphasized peer connection, entertainment, and information access, often downplaying family impact.

However, even among youth, moments of ambivalence surfaced. Several young respondents acknowledged feeling ‘empty,’ ‘tired,’ or ‘disconnected’ despite constant connectivity, echoing global findings on digital fatigue (Twenge, 2019).

5.4. Integrative Analysis: Linking Numbers and Narratives

The integration of findings reveals three core mechanisms through which social media erodes family bonds in Bangladesh:

5.4.1. Attentional Displacement as Structural Erosion

Quantitative mediation analysis confirms that attention diverted to screens reduces shared time, while qualitative narratives show how this displacement dismantles everyday rituals. Together, these findings demonstrate that erosion is incremental and structural, not dramatic or episodic.

5.4.2. Emotional Thinning Rather than Outright Conflict

Rather than increasing overt conflict, social media use produces what participants described as emotional thinning—a gradual weakening of intimacy, responsiveness, and mutual awareness. This aligns with research suggesting that digital media often erodes relationships subtly rather than explosively (Baym, 2015).

5.4.3. Cultural Mismatch and Accelerated Rupture

In Bangladesh, family bonds are embedded in collectivist norms emphasizing presence, respect, and interdependence. Social media platforms, by contrast, are designed around individual attention, personalization, and algorithmic engagement.

This cultural mismatch accelerates relational strain, making the effects of social media particularly pronounced in Global South family systems.

5.5. Comparative and Contextual Interpretation

When interpreted alongside global literature, the Bangladeshi case demonstrates both convergence and divergence. Like families in the Global North, Bangladeshi households experience attention fragmentation and reduced interaction. However, because families remain central to economic security, moral formation, and social identity, the consequences are more socially consequential.

Thus, ‘bowling alone’ in Bangladesh does not merely signify declining civic participation but signals a reconfiguration of the most fundamental social unit—the family.

5.6. Summary of Key Findings

1. High-intensity social media use is significantly associated with reduced family cohesion.
2. Reduced shared family time partially mediates this relationship.
3. Passive consumption is more corrosive than interactive use.
4. Gendered and generational dynamics shape both use patterns and perceived harm.
5. Qualitative evidence reveals emotional withdrawal, ritual erosion, and cultural tension as core mechanisms.

These findings set the stage for a broader discussion of theoretical implications, policy relevance, and pathways for intervention in the Global South context.

6. Discussion and Policy Implications

6.1. Reinterpreting 'Bowling Alone' in the Global South

This study extends Putnam's (2000) thesis of declining social capital into the digital age and relocates it within the socio-cultural context of the Global South, with a particular focus on Bangladesh. The findings suggest that while social media has not eliminated family life, it has reconfigured the conditions under which family bonds are produced, sustained, and experienced. Unlike the civic disengagement Putnam observed in the United States, the Bangladeshi case demonstrates a subtler yet arguably more consequential process: the attenuation of everyday relational intimacy within the family unit.

In collectivist societies such as Bangladesh, family interaction is not merely a private matter but a foundational mechanism for social reproduction, moral education, and emotional security. The erosion of these bonds through sustained attentional displacement therefore represents a structural shift in how social capital is generated. This reframing highlights that 'bowling alone' in the Global South is less about declining association membership and more about fragmented co-presence and emotional thinning inside the household.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

6.2.1. Digital Displacement as Relational, Not Temporal

The findings refine displacement theory by demonstrating that social media does not simply replace time spent with family but alters the quality of interaction even when time is shared. The prevalence of 'together but alone' experiences illustrates that displacement operates at the level of attention, emotion, and ritual, rather than purely through time substitution.

This supports and extends Turkle's (2011) argument that digital technologies reshape relational expectations, producing a form of 'ambient absence.' In Bangladesh, where face-to-face interaction traditionally carries strong moral weight, this ambient absence carries heightened symbolic and emotional consequences.

6.2.2. Bonding Social Capital Under Algorithmic Pressure

By empirically linking social media use to declines in family cohesion, this study contributes to social capital theory by foregrounding bonding capital rather than the bridging capital emphasized in much digital optimism literature. While social media may enhance weak-tie connections, it appears to undermine the dense, emotionally saturated ties that families depend on.

This finding resonates with critiques of platform capitalism, which prioritize engagement metrics over relational depth (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018). Algorithms that reward constant attention inadvertently extract emotional energy from intimate social contexts, converting it into data value.

6.2.3. Cultural Mismatch and Accelerated Erosion

The study underscores the importance of cultural context in digital sociology. Social media platforms are largely designed within individualistic cultural frameworks, emphasizing self-presentation, personalization, and continuous engagement. When introduced into collectivist family systems, these logics generate friction and strain.

In Bangladesh, this mismatch accelerates erosion because family life is expected to absorb stress rather than compete with external attention economies. The result is not open rebellion against family norms but quiet disengagement, which is harder to detect and address.

6.3. Gendered and Generational Interpretations

6.3.1. Gendered Emotional Labor in the Digital Household

The findings reveal that women—particularly mothers—bear disproportionate emotional responsibility for maintaining family cohesion in digitally saturated households. While men often framed their screen use as informational or work-related, women described emotional neglect and invisibility.

This pattern reflects broader gender inequalities in care work and emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012). Digital technologies do not neutralize these inequalities; instead, they often intensify them by legitimizing absence under the guise of productivity or connectivity.

6.3.2. Generational Normalization of Disconnection

Generational differences in perception suggest an emerging normalization of fragmented interaction among youth. Younger participants largely viewed constant connectivity as inevitable, even as they acknowledged feelings of fatigue or emptiness.

This ambivalence indicates that erosion of family bonds is not fully internalized as loss by younger generations but as a redefinition of what family interaction means. Over time, this normalization may reshape expectations of care, responsibility, and emotional availability within Bangladeshi families.

6.4. Policy Implications

The findings call for multi-level policy interventions that recognize family life as a critical site of digital impact.

6.4.1. Family-Centered Digital Literacy Policies

Current digital literacy initiatives in Bangladesh focus primarily on technical skills and online safety. These programs should be expanded to include relational digital literacy, emphasizing:

- Awareness of attentional displacement
 - The emotional costs of constant connectivity
 - Strategies for device-free family interaction
- Such initiatives could be integrated into school curricula and community education programs, recognizing families as co-learners rather than passive recipients of technology.

6.4.2. Educational Interventions and School–Family Partnerships

Schools play a crucial role in shaping norms around technology use. Policies should encourage:

- Screen-use guidelines for homework and study
- Parent–teacher workshops on digital balance
- Structured offline collaborative activities

By aligning educational institutions with family well-being, policymakers can mitigate the spillover of digital saturation into domestic life.

6.4.3. Workplace and Labor Policy Reforms

One of the structural drivers of digital intrusion into family life is the normalization of always-on work culture, particularly among urban professionals. Labor policies should:

- Encourage clear boundaries between work and family time
- Promote the right to disconnect outside working hours
- Discourage employer expectations of constant online availability

These reforms are particularly relevant in Bangladesh's growing service and digital sectors.

6.4.4. Platform Accountability and Regulation

At the macro level, the study highlights the need for greater accountability of social media platforms whose business models depend on maximizing user attention. Policymakers should explore:

- Transparency requirements for algorithmic design
- Time-use dashboards and default usage limits
- Public-interest design standards that prioritize well-being

While national regulation alone may be limited, Bangladesh can align with global initiatives advocating for ethical platform governance.

6.5. Implications for the Global South

Beyond Bangladesh, the findings offer broader insights into digital transformation in the Global South. In contexts where family remains the primary social safety net, the erosion of family bonds has cascading effects on mental health, caregiving, and social cohesion.

This suggests that digital policy debates must move beyond infrastructure and access to address the social architecture of everyday life. Failure to do so risks reproducing inequalities not only between nations but within households.

6.6. Directions for Future Research

Future studies should consider:

- Longitudinal designs to track changes in family interaction over time
- Ethnographic research on digital rituals within households
- Comparative studies across Global South contexts
- The role of emerging platforms (e.g., short-video apps) in accelerating attention fragmentation

Such research would further refine theoretical and policy responses to digital-era family transformation.

6.7. Concluding Reflection

This study demonstrates that social media's most profound impact in the Global South may not lie in political polarization or economic disruption alone but in the quiet reshaping of family life. The erosion of everyday intimacy, though subtle, threatens the foundations of social cohesion in societies where family bonds remain central.

Addressing this challenge requires reimagining digital progress not solely in terms of connectivity but in terms of relational sustainability.

7. Bangladesh-Focused Policy Framework: Family, Education, and Digital Regulation

7.1. Rationale for a Context-Sensitive Policy Framework

Bangladesh's digital transformation has progressed rapidly, driven by smartphone penetration, social media platforms, and state-led 'Digital Bangladesh' initiatives. While these developments have

enhanced connectivity and access to information, the findings of this study demonstrate that digital expansion has outpaced social governance, particularly at the level of family life.

Unlike many Global North contexts where civic institutions absorb social disruption, Bangladeshi families remain the primary unit of emotional care, moral education, and social security. Therefore, policy responses to digital disruption must move beyond infrastructure, access, and cybersecurity to address relational sustainability—the capacity of families to maintain cohesion under conditions of continuous digital attention.

This framework proposes three interlinked policy domains:

1. Family-centered social policy
2. Education and institutional socialization
3. Digital platform regulation and governance

7.2. Family-Centered Policy Interventions

7.2.1. Recognizing the Family as a Digital Impact Zone

Current digital policies in Bangladesh treat individuals as isolated users. This study demonstrates that social media's effects are relational, unfolding within households. Policy must therefore recognize families as digital impact zones where attention economies reshape interaction, authority, and emotional exchange.

A first policy step is to formally integrate **family well-being indicators** into national digital development strategies, including:

- Quality of family interaction
- Time spent in shared activities
- Perceived emotional availability among family members

Such indicators could be incorporated into household surveys conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

7.2.2. Family Digital Well-Being Programs

The Ministry of Social Welfare, in collaboration with local government institutions and NGOs, should pilot Family Digital Well-Being Programs focusing on:

- Awareness of attentional displacement
- Negotiating household screen norms
- Device-free family rituals (meals, prayer, conversation)

Unlike punitive or restrictive approaches, these programs should emphasize collective negotiation, respecting generational differences while reaffirming shared responsibility.

Community-based delivery—through Union Parishads, community centers, and religious institutions—would enhance cultural legitimacy.

7.2.3. Gender-Sensitive Family Policies

The findings show that women, particularly mothers, bear disproportionate emotional labor in digitally fragmented households. Policy interventions should therefore:

- Integrate digital stress and emotional labor into women's mental health programs
- Support mothers through counseling and peer-support groups
- Acknowledge unpaid emotional work in family policy discourse

Without addressing gendered burdens, digital family policies risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them (Hochschild, 2012).

7.3. Education-Based Policy Interventions

7.3.1. Relational Digital Literacy in School Curricula

Digital literacy in Bangladesh is currently framed around technical competence and online safety. This framework argues for expanding curricula to include relational digital literacy, covering:

- Attention management and screen fatigue
- Impacts of social media on family interaction
- Ethical communication and emotional presence

Such content can be integrated into:

- Social science and civics courses
- Life-skills education
- Moral and citizenship education

By embedding these themes early, schools can shape norms that value balanced connectivity rather than constant engagement.

7.3.2. School–Family Partnerships

Schools should not treat digital behavior as solely a student issue. Policy should encourage structured school–family partnerships, including:

- Parent workshops on managing household screen use
- Guidance on homework-related screen time
- Dialogue between teachers and parents on digital stress

These initiatives would reduce intergenerational misunderstanding and position schools as mediators rather than enforcers.

7.3.3. Regulating Educational Digital Overload

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, screen-based education intensified, often without clear boundaries. Policymakers should:

- Establish age-appropriate daily screen limits for educational use
- Encourage offline collaborative learning
- Prevent normalization of excessive screen exposure in early education

Educational technology must be evaluated not only for efficiency but for its social spillover into family life.

7.4. Digital Platform Regulation and Governance

7.4.1. Moving Beyond Content Regulation

Bangladesh's digital regulation has focused primarily on content control, misinformation, and cybersecurity. While important, this approach overlooks the structural drivers of relational erosion, particularly algorithmic attention extraction.

Policy must shift from what content is shown to how engagement is engineered.

7.4.2. Algorithmic Transparency and Time Governance

The government, through the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), should advocate for:

- Transparency in algorithmic recommendation systems
- Default screen-time reminders and usage dashboards
- Opt-in rather than opt-out engagement intensification features

While Bangladesh alone cannot transform global platforms, aligning with international digital governance efforts strengthens regulatory leverage (van Dijck et al., 2018).

7.4.3. Platform Responsibility for Social Well-Being

Social media companies operating in Bangladesh should be encouraged—or required—to conduct **social impact assessments**, including effects on family life and mental health.

Policy tools may include:

- Co-regulatory frameworks

- Public-interest design standards
- Independent audits of engagement mechanisms

This reframes platforms not merely as neutral intermediaries but as social actors with relational consequences.

7.5. Cross-Sectoral Coordination

Effective implementation requires coordination across:

- Ministry of ICT
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Social Welfare
- Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

A National Digital Well-Being Task Force could harmonize policies, ensuring that digital development does not undermine social cohesion.

7.6. Implications for the Global South

Bangladesh's experience reflects broader Global South dynamics where digital platforms enter societies with strong family structures but weak regulatory capacity. This framework offers a replicable model emphasizing:

- Family as policy unit
- Education as norm-shaping institution
- Regulation as social, not merely technical governance

Ignoring these dimensions risks reproducing digital inequality within households, not just between nations.

7.7. Concluding Policy Insight

This study demonstrates that the erosion of family bonds in the digital age is not an inevitable consequence of modernization but a governance challenge. Policies that prioritize access without attention to relational impact risk hollowing out the very social foundations that sustain development.

For Bangladesh, the path forward lies in human-centered digital governance—one that values connectivity without sacrificing intimacy, efficiency without eroding care, and innovation without dissolving the family.

8. Conclusions

This study set out to examine how social media use reshapes family life in the Global South, with a focused empirical and theoretical investigation of Bangladesh. Drawing on mixed-methods evidence, the research demonstrates that the most consequential impact of social media may not lie in overt conflict, political polarization, or public discourse alone, but in the quiet erosion of everyday family interaction. In Bangladesh, where family remains the primary site of emotional care, moral education, and social security, this erosion carries profound social implications.

Revisiting Putnam's (2000) 'bowling alone' thesis through the lens of digital media reveals a contextual shift. In the Bangladeshi case, social fragmentation does not primarily manifest through declining civic participation but through fragmented co-presence within households. Family members remain physically together, yet emotionally and attentively dispersed across algorithmically curated digital spaces. This condition—being together but psychologically absent—signals a transformation in the nature of bonding social capital.

The quantitative findings confirm a strong negative association between intensive social media use and family cohesion, even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic variables. Reduced shared family time partially mediates this relationship, indicating that attentional displacement is a key mechanism. However, the qualitative findings reveal that erosion extends

beyond time loss to include diminished emotional availability, weakened rituals, and subtle withdrawal rather than overt conflict. These processes accumulate gradually, making them difficult to detect yet deeply consequential.

Gender and generational dynamics further complicate this transformation. Women, particularly mothers, bear disproportionate emotional labor in maintaining family cohesion in digitally saturated households. Meanwhile, younger generations increasingly normalize fragmented interaction, redefining family presence in ways that may recalibrate expectations of care, responsibility, and intimacy over time. This generational normalization suggests that erosion is not only a present condition but also a future trajectory.

Theoretically, the study advances digital sociology and social capital theory by foregrounding bonding social capital under algorithmic pressure. While much scholarship celebrates social media's capacity to expand networks and amplify voices, this research demonstrates that such expansion often occurs at the expense of dense, emotionally sustaining ties. In collectivist contexts like Bangladesh, this trade-off is particularly destabilizing.

From a policy perspective, the findings challenge prevailing development narratives that equate digital progress with social advancement. Connectivity without relational safeguards risks hollowing out the social foundations upon which development depends. Family-centered digital literacy, education-based norm formation, and platform accountability emerge as critical policy domains for mitigating unintended consequences.

Ultimately, this study argues that the erosion of family bonds in the age of screens is not technologically inevitable, but socially and politically contingent. The future of family life in Bangladesh—and across the Global South—will depend on whether digital governance prioritizes not only access and efficiency, but also relational sustainability. Addressing this challenge requires reimagining digital development as a human-centered project, one that recognizes that the strength of societies is built not merely on connectivity, but on care, presence, and shared life.

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