

# Social Media Causing Communication Gap: A Study of Middle-Class Families in Latifabad, Hyderabad, Pakistan

Rashid Ali Khuhro<sup>1\*</sup>, Bashir Memon<sup>2</sup>, and Rabia Wahid<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

*In family communication, the effective communication stands as the base of strong relations among the family members. However, a little gap in communication weakens family relationships and creates severe problems. Like all types of advanced communication channels; the advent of social media has also facilitated the effectiveness of interface among people. Although, social media's instantaneous communication process ended the communication gap among masses. Thus, many scholars believed that it has also created a communication gap among humans, especially in family communication. In this way, this study aimed to examine the communication gap created by social media among middle-class families of sub-division Latifabad Sindh, Pakistan. The researchers adopted a focus group discussion technique to collect data from three middle-class families. The result of this study shows that most of the focus group participants prefer communication in interpersonal communication settings. Further, it reveals that the majority of the family members use social media by smartphone, tabs and laptops. Significantly, the findings of this study emerged that social media creates a communication gap among middle-class families of Latifabad Hyderabad, Sindh –Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Social Media; Social Networking Sites; Communication Gap; Online Relationship; Family Relationship.

## 1. Introduction

Human beings are social by the nature and craved to connect and think of having a better relationship with other people around them. Likewise, human relationships depend on the effective communication between them. In such the context, everywhere, at home, in the street, at school, in the market, people share information, feelings, thoughts, or behavior through the communication process. Like all communication settings; the effective communication is the base of stable relations among family members. Nevertheless, the gap in communication may be one of the factors that make these family relations weak and creating the severe problems in the relationships among family members.

Though, like the all types of advanced communication mediums, the advent of social media also has facilitated the effectiveness of communication

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<sup>1</sup> Department Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh

<sup>2</sup> Department Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh

<sup>3</sup> Department Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh

\*)Corresponding Author.

Email: [rashid.khuhro@usindh.edu.pk](mailto:rashid.khuhro@usindh.edu.pk)

among masses. Hence, social media comes under new media and is a form of electronic communication (Kumar & Sriram, 2019). It is being referred to as websites, different social networking sites, applications, micro blogging, and social bookmarking. Thus, it is designed to allow the people to share and exchange their information, knowledge, new ideas, and other content to keep in touch with their families, friends, classmates, and colleagues. Further, it has a characteristic that it is a two-way street where the people can communicate in the form of comments or vote on an article. Though it is different from traditional and mainstream media that is almost one-way-street, there is no space to express their feedback regarding the communicated content instantaneously (Lawlor, 2018).

Moreover, social media tends to interact with the people online rather than face to face communication; this developed the social interaction more accessible to ordinary people. The straightforward analysis of technological inclination shows how rapidly the internet has altered the way of communication (Khalid, 2017). Social media has diversified media that is based on internet devices. Previously, the people just used the internet on their personal computers. Therefore, in this growing world of technology and awareness, the people now use internet through their smartphones too and that is easily accessible as well portable. Adoption of smartphones by people has been a global phenomenon, and due to the excessive use of smartphones, the usage of social media has increased.

On the one hand, social media is a medium of communication, and in a globalized context, it has ended the communication gaps among masses. The people use it for all purposes such as information, entertainment, education, and creating awareness among the masses. Although, social media's instantaneous communication process ended the communication gap among masses. In this context, the presence of features in social media such as video calling, audio text, and instant text messaging brought people nearer to each other. A person from one corner of the world can watch, listen, and feel the movement of another person present in the other corner of the world. Though social media has made the communication process stronger, thus, many scholars believe that it has also created a communication gap (Storch & Ortiz Juarez-Paz, 2019).

As it is observed that the latest mode of communication reduces to face to face interaction slowly. Hence it changes individuals' behavior. Amichai-Hamburger and Ben-Artzi (2003) explained that the internet is going to be highly dominant; thus, some scholars have observed that heavy Internet users seem isolated from regular social contacts, and may even cut these off as the internet becomes the predominant social factor in their lives (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). The reason behind it is that these media isolate people because the heavy reliance of people in gadgets make them habitual, and it decreases the amount of interpersonal relationship (Mullan & Chatzitheochari, 2019) as a result, less frequency of interpersonal communication creates a communication gap among the masses.

Bornstein and Sawyer (2006) said that "family like the human body is truly a whole consisting of interrelated parts. Each of which affects and is affected by every other part. Each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole." Today modern society has given rise to a complexity and diversity of personal relationships, which has led to increased questions about the future structure of the family". According to Scott (1997) their traditional household family system has been declined, and people become more independent and spending less time together.

For this reason, it has been interceding that the position of families has changed in our society. Along with the rise of individualism and independence; family values have declined. New media technologies are much more attractive to families, Sharaievska & Stodolska, (2017) and hold on it for changing their daily routine (Lanigan, 2009). This phenomenon has given birth to many problems for instance an increased number of divorces, the participation of women in the workforce (McGrath, 2012).

Bargh and McKenna (2004) narrated that most of the family members communicate every day of their lives using social networking sites, over a billion text messages are sent through mobile phones around the world. According to Fife, LaCava, and Nelson (2013) mostly, the younger generation is a conscious and hesitated to add their family members on Facebook. It is because they tend to hide their activities on Facebook and also the reason for fare cleft in the family relationship (George & Odgers, 2015). They also disclose some parts of the profile information to a family member. Usually, it is observed that families these days are busy in making the remote social relationships instead of talking with surrounding the masses. The father may be watching television and mother is active on their smartphone chitchats with other relatives. Besides to this, the son is fighting with aliens on their computer meanwhile daughter is working with the different applications on their smartphone. Thus, the eyeball of an individual member in the family is on the front of the screens (Joo & Teng, 2017). Spending countless hours on the internet and spending minimal time with family and this hobby turns to social isolation. In this perspective, children developed the new relationships on the internet and very close enough to them. As a result, fake people deceive them quickly and hurt their emotions (George & Odgers, 2015).

Henceforth, the much more studies have neglected to examine the issues, and clashes generated by social media among people's lives. Further, it reduces interpersonal communication and creates communication gaps among family members, and it leads to misunderstanding among family members. Social media has also created the communication gap among members too (Gjylbegaj & Abdi, 2019). This study aimed to examine the communication gap as created by social media among middle-class families of Latifabad, Hyderabad, and Sindh, Pakistan. The choice of middle class families has been taken and the possible for the researchers to have accessible approach to these families to convince them for the purpose of data acquisition

## 1.1 Objectives

1. To determine communication settings among middle-class family members in Latifabad
2. To study social media usage patterns of middle-class family members in Latifabad
3. To examine whether social media causes a communication gap among the middle-class family members in Latifabad

## 1.2 Research Questions

1. In which communication setting the middle-class family members in Latifabad prefer to communicate?
2. What are the social media usage patterns of middle-class family members in Latifabad?
3. Does social media cause communication gap among the middle-class family members in Latifabad?

## 1.3 Research Method

In this qualitative study the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted for data collection. Thus, for this factual research work upper-middle-class families of Latifabad, Hyderabad-Sindh were sampled purposively. The families of Latifabad sub-division were selected because it is an urban area of the city, where the majority of the residents belong to the middle-class. For sampling, it was considered that the selected families must have family members - father, mother, son, and daughter. Hence, the first these families having other family members who were identified. The then, a total of three focus group discussions were conducted. In this perspective, after three FGDs, the received responses produced the similar patterns with respect to saturation point.

However, before doing FGDs, each family was briefed about the purpose of conducting FGD and the use of collected data; and prior to this, the consent of family was also taken. Further to reveal that it is a prominent trend in the middle-class families in Hyderabad that mostly fathers work to earn the livelihood for family meanwhile mothers stay at home as housewives and managing household choruses. As the consequence of working days, children likely to go to school and their fathers for work. Thus, the FGDs were conducted on holidays including Saturday and Sunday. Besides, the timing of the FGDs was chosen at dinner time because the entire family members have time to get together at this particular time to have dinner together.

To involve the families in FGD, the researchers pre-designed a set of open-ended questionnaire, considering the research objectives and research questions for this research study. For such the questionnaire, the initial questions entirely covered the demographic information of the FGD participants. Thus, other items addressing the themes of communication

setting among families, usage patterns of social media among family members, and communication gap among families. Earlier to this, the researchers personally negotiated to respective families prior to visiting their houses for FGD. Henceforth,

The overall setting of FGD was comprised of a dining table of the participant families in this respect, and the discussion carried out during dinner service in the similar pattern, the researchers played the part of moderators and participants for such the debate. Prior to the initiative of discussion; the researchers acquired the consent from the families for recording on audio device of the discussion. Thus, the recorded material as transcribed and translated from Urdu into English language properly. In this way, the transcribed data first made clean and the then analyzed manually in the pattern of themes.

## 2. Findings

This research study designed to examine the communication gap as created by social media among middle-class families of Latifabad - Hyderabad, Sindh-Pakistan. Whereas the entire world revolves around the pivot of technological advancement mainly information and communication technology. Hence, every technological advancement has both positive and negative sides, the most notably is to circulate negatively and misused or abused. Therefore, it is the case with interactive media, particularly social media. For such the fact, the data was gained through FGDs, and transcribed, translated and analyzed manually. In a sequel of this, the findings of this research study given as under: -

**Table.1** Demographic information

| Family#        | Family Size                       | Status       | Parent's Education                       | Occupation  | Income                  | House ownership                  |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Family1</b> | Members 5<br>Daughters 2<br>Son 1 | Middle-class | Father: Intermediate<br>Mother: Matric   | Business    | Per month<br>Rs. 60,000 | Personal Apartment<br>Bedrooms.4 |
| <b>Family2</b> | Members 5<br>Daughters 3          | Middle-class | Father: Master<br>Mother: Bachelor       | Private Job | Per month<br>Rs. 50,000 | Rented house<br>Bedrooms 5       |
| <b>Family3</b> | Members 5<br>Daughters 2<br>Son 1 | Middle-class | Father: Bachelor<br>Mother: Intermediate | Contractor  | Per month<br>Rs. 40,000 | Rented house<br>Bedrooms 4       |

**Table.1** illustrating the findings of demographic information of the families. The result indicated that Family1, a middle-class family, is living in a nuclear family system, including the five members, two daughters, and a son. Their parents were not highly educated. Father has their own spare parts business. Whereas the mother is a fabulous and talented house wife and works as a

ladies' tailor at home. The elder daughter is studying at university, the second daughter is in college, and the son is school going. Additionally, Family1 owned a small apartment with four rooms having two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. It was clean and well-organized home. All the things were well-decorated with religious sceneries and the different art materials showing such a peaceful environment of the house.

Further, findings disclosed that Family 2 also belongs to a middle-class nuclear family and comprised of father, mother, and three daughters. Their parents were well-educated; the father has a Master's degree-level education, and the mother has got a Bachelor's degree. The father is in a private job and mother is a simple, disciplined housewife. The elder daughter is doing a Master's degree privately and teaching in a private school simultaneously. The second daughter has graduated and teaching in private school at the same fashion. Both daughters support their families financially. Besides to this, the third younger daughter is studying at university. Though Family2 rented a small single-story house with a 2-bedroom, a dining, a kitchen, and the storeroom, it was a newly structured, well-furnished, and organized home and decorated with the different art materials and beautiful paintings on walls.

Parting with this, the findings of Family3, resulting that middle-class family having two daughters, a son, and the parents. The father has graduation level education, and their mother having intermediate. Though the father was an electrical contractor, and mother as a fabulous housewife. Although the elder daughters were studying for bachelor degree, and the son was in college. Family 3 had a small rented house with three rooms having a bedroom, the drawing-room, and a tiny kitchen. It was not the well- decorated and fully furnished, but well- organized, neat, and clean house.

### 3. Communication Settings

**Table.2** Communication Settings among Families

| Family# | Communication Settings                                                                                                                                   |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Family1 | Interpersonal communication<br>Machine-Assisted Interpersonal communication.<br>Most probably, Family1 relies on interpersonal communication among them. |
| Family2 | Interpersonal Communication<br>Machine-Assisted Interpersonal Communication<br>Family2 also relies on interpersonal communication.                       |
| Family3 | Interpersonal Communication<br>Family3 stresses on interpersonal communication.                                                                          |

**Table.2** highlights the findings of the communication settings among families. The result illuminated that Family 1 communicated in interpersonal communication settings. All family members seated together and discussed everything. They ate together on the dining table., If family members were outside for any work, and they communicated by mobile phone and discussed

everything interpersonally too. It showed that Family1 also relied on machine-assisted interpersonal communication

Besides, the findings of Family 2 indicated that they even communicated in interpersonal communication and machine-assisted interpersonal communication setting. In the similar vein, Family3 also communicated in interpersonal communication and machine-assisted interpersonal communication. Thus, this study found that middle-class families in Latifabad, Hyderabad as communicated in interpersonal communication settings.

#### 4. Usage Patterns of Social Media

**Table.3** Social Media Usage Patterns

| Family# | Social Media Use                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Family1 | Father uses a smartphone as well as social media.<br>The mother uses a smartphone, but she does not have social media accounts. Thus she watches videos on YouTube.<br>Daughter(s) use smartphones and social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.<br>This family is a moderate user of social media. |
| Family2 | Most of the family members have a smartphone. All have social media accounts and operate those regularly. The entire family uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, SNAPCHAT, and WhatsApp. They frequently watch videos on YouTube.                                                                                            |
| Family3 | All family members have smartphones. Though parents do not use social media, meanwhile, children use social media, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube on smartphones, Tabs, and Laptops.                                                                                                                   |

The information and content comprised in table 3 is to describe and analyze the social media usage patterns by the middle class families. In this way, the findings of usage patterns of social media resulted that in Family1, using a mobile phone is considered as good and even till late at night. Before midnight, children go to bed and do not phone call lately. Although children and fathers use social media but, the mother does not have a social media account. She watches religious lectures on YouTube. Nevertheless, the father uses social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) only for information purposes. Though children use it for all-purpose. Therefore, results showed that Family1 is a moderate user of social media.

Further, findings of the usage pattern of social media in Family 2 explained that most of the family members had social media accounts, and they used those frequently. They used social media for all purposes, for instance entertainment, interaction, information, and education. Though this family included of three daughters, meanwhile the parents permitted them to use a smartphone and own social media accounts freely.

Paring with this, the findings of social media usage patterns among Family 3 pointed out that most of the members of the family using smartphones, but not excessively. The smartphones are considered as a communicating device. According to them, these technological things are the necessity for the present time. Though children use social media, whereas the parents do not have social media accounts. Though daughters use social media for all purposes, they have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok too. In a sequel, the result witnessed that all families use social media, and most of the members are frequent users of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube.

## **5. Communication Gap among Families**

In this section, the findings of the study surfaced out of the analysis of the data pertaining to communication gap among middle class families as segregated with respect to relationship inside a family. Thus, the results given as under: below.

### **5.1 Opinion of Mothers**

Explicitly and implicitly speaking, the mother coded the same statements about her family environment which may change a little bit and over time and increase slowly as well gradually. There happens the pleasant situation when the web of the technologies does not trap and revolve our surroundings highly and speedily.

Discussing our social lives with respect to social market; social media slowly and gradually the despite inevitably resulted social changes in a human society. However, today's society is attached with the various people providing the innumerable knowledge and to the point updates. Irrespective to this, such the scenarios produced isolation and taken away social relationship generating gaps between the next close to us albeit each mother of such the families confessed that they had confronted with the slot on account of the middle-class families and the most of these mothers were housewives and usually spent their times at homes lonely.

However, the immediate communicators as comprised of their family members including husband, children, and other family members. Whenever their children and husband come back home: they give them a little bit of priority and spend time with them. Henceforth, the most of the time, they get busy with gadgets. By using mobile phones, laptops, tabs, and desktops: they start chatting with friends through the different applications of social media. They start connecting socially to everyone. Children usually play games in front of their mothers. Though mothers intend to spend time with them, but, they become busy in using social networking sites.

**Except from data of mother of Family 2:**

Not so much change I saw in my family environment due to social media. But, yes, I saw a little bit change in my son's behavior because of this TIKTOK application. He mostly uses it and makes videos. For that purpose, he stands at any corner of the house and starts dancing, singing the song and lip singing some heroic dialogues. Though, these songs and dialogues are running out the whole day in his mind and lip sings. Thus, I sometimes shout on him and ask what he is doing every time and performing the pathetic actions and dance. He remains busy in such types of activities.

Further, the mothers also complained that this excessive usage of mobile phones and social media had hooked their children. They all do not concentrate on their work. The mother of Family1 said that 'she has taken it very seriously and she is conscious about her son's studies. He is a school going student. However, the excessive usage of these gadgets affects her son's exam result. He went back from the first position to the third position.' She says she has started working to keep him away from social media and these gadgets.

Similarly, the mother of Family2 told that 'her daughter is a university student. A few months ago, due to her hectic work; she had reserved herself in one room. She has stopped going anywhere. She even does not mingle with other family members.' Alarming, these things increased anxiety, desperation, and fidgety in her. This situation has kept her away from her family. In this way, the mother of the Family3 looks well satisfied with their children. She expressed that there are issues, and realizing them as minor rather than alarming in this perspective.

**Excerpt from data of Mother of Family 3:**

I have observed some changes in my elder daughter. She is not frequent user of mobile phone. Whenever she uses it, she forgets the world. It creates misunderstanding because her complete focus is on it, and gives annoying replies many times. Sometimes, I force her to put down her phone and do house chores the first. She obeys it, but after many calls. I think for her updating her status on social media because mobile phone is an important than the house chores. But, I she must focus on her work.

The findings of the research study resulted that mothers are also concerned about the excessive use of social media; and made clear through the discussions with them that the usage of social media created a communication gap among family members.

## 5.2 Opinion of Fathers

The findings displayed that as compared to mothers, fathers inside these families took less part in the conversation. Thus, they examined and quoted critical and affective factors. Fathers are of the views that they live in a society that leads the communication gap among us. Most of the fathers give the similar reasons like mothers. According to them, mobile is a very advantageous useful medium for getting information. However, now a day, everyone has mobile phones on their hands. Though many people do not need it: they keep it with them. It seems shocking that how people use this effective medium and wasting their precious time on it.

Further, fathers discussed that many youngsters use it while driving, riding a bike, and even use it till late night at many corners of the roads the outcomes of the study further elaborated that fathers mainly focus on the excessive usage of social media making bewildered to our children and throwing off them in a self-centered world where they feel free and so-called independent. Due to this, most of the children disobey their parents and do not spend proper time with them. The children, mostly teenagers, may lose their responsibilities towards home and parental hood.

### Excerpt from data of father of Family 1:

I have observed that many of youngsters from my window of apartment. They sit outside in the lobbies of the houses and use mobile phones immensely. In my opinion, it is all our parents' fault that we are responsible for these realities and we give the cell phone to our children at their earlier age instead of giving them toys or our company we have shown them cartoons, games or any other video on internet to become busy, and we feel free or relaxed to do our tasks. Beside to this, it is our reasonability to check out what they prefer to do with the internet.

### Excerpt from data of father of Family 3:

Yes, I can say for sure that social media creates communication gap among peoples. It is harsh reality of today that social media destroys our social norms and demolishes them slowly.

On the other hand, fathers blame for that pathetic situation about their children. They are of the views it happens because the parents pay for expensive mobiles for their children, and they become the habitual because of a lack of attention from their parents. That is a crucial time for their moral training, but children get busy with these gadgets. The only solution to save them and their career is to limit them on the usage of social media networking sites. The above results showed that fathers are also of the views that social media and gadgets create a communication gap among families. Added, with time, it is increasing.

**Excerpt from data of father of Family 2:**

Yes, I strongly believe that social media creates the communication gap among family members. But it has a little bit impact. If we compare our childhood with ourselves, we were initially taught to fulfill our responsibilities and duties towards elders. But now, I saw some changes in it. Now a day's I see children neither obey nor respect their elders. If elders say something or guide them. They reply in abusive manner. Most of the times, they confidently use mobile phone without any guilt or shame. I think it is a mistake of the parents. They give mobile phone to children in their growing age, where they need of proper guidance, care and attention. But, parents do not care.

**5.3 Opinion of Daughters**

The findings of the daughters disclosed that they were the primary users of social networking sites. It is clear from their discussions that mostly daughters use social media for study and entertainment purposes. They all concerned that their excessive use takes them away from their social life. It disconnects them from their family members and relatives. It diverts them from religious teachings. Because of it, they lack interest in extra-curricular activities and keep them in their irregular relations. It deteriorates their health, and they turn to eagerness, frustration, anxiety, and apprehension, and sometimes a person behaves annoyingly and in an unacceptable manner. However, daughters also share concerns about the excessive use of social media. They have expressed below.

**Excerpts from data of daughter2 of Family1:**

I thought on social media there is an expression issue. A person cannot understand to another person's expression, what they are trying to say or what they want. So, I think this is another issue to generate clashes between us.

Such the perspectives have been shared by another participant of focus group discussion.

**Excerpt from data of daughter2 Family 2**

Mobile phone is good for us because it connects us to globe with in a second. However, this reality also exists that we are just connected only socially to others, but, in a practical life, it creates barriers between us. When I start using my social accounts time runs so fast and I had wasted my so many hours on it.

### 5.4 Opinions of Sons

The findings of sons presented that they are the younger children of these families. That is why they divert quickly due to the frequent usage of the mobile phone. It takes them more away from their family goals as compared to daughters. The reason behind it is that they use social media more than their sisters. Though most of the time, daughters stay at home and remain in front of their parents, particularly mothers. They play games, chat with friends, and use it excessively. They interact interpersonally less with their family members. From the above analysis, it is clear that sons also take part in using social media and related gadgets excessively. It also creates a communication gap among family members.

## 6. Discussion

Nevertheless, the goal of this study is to articulate the family communication setting of those people who remain engaged with the use of social media. Though in response to the RO(i) and RQ(i) the findings have revealed that middle-class families in Latifabad, Hyderabad communicate in interpersonal communication settings.

Further, the findings of RO (ii) and RQ (ii) showed that all the three family members use social media moderately, though the mothers in families showed less interest in the use of social media. Most of the mothers are interested in using YouTube for watching videos of religious scholars. However, fathers have social media accounts and use Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for social communication. Children having accounts on all types of social media, and use social media frequently through smartphones, Tabs and Laptops.

Furthermore, in response to the RO(iii) and RQ(iii), the findings exposed that social media created a communication gap among middle-class families of Latifabad. As it is hypothesized that in the presence of human society, the excessive usage of social media created a communication gap among its users, and it decreased the amount of interpersonal communication. Further, the result of the development of such a communication setting leads to not only misunderstanding but also generating some physical and mental health issues (George & Odgers, 2015).

In this context, the findings of this study showed that it takes place the account of the presence of smartphones and other such technological gadgets in our society meanwhile the Internet becomes the primary source of information and entertainment (Kumar & Sriram, 2019). Thus, a significant number of youngsters used social networking sites for getting information and updates. Additionally, the general population of society also uses social media for entertainment, information, association, and communication with their friends and family members who lived far away. Nevertheless, this study found that though at the one hand social media connects humans socially and broadens their social circle, and such the practice of social media gradually affects their practical life negatively (Koç & Akbıyık, 2020).

The users of social media probably become a victim of isolation even at such level that they may forget who is sitting next to them. Further, the youngsters who use social media get highly habitual of different social media applications and lose the interest of their essential education choruses and obligations of various family relationships. It supports the findings given by the Bruggeman, Van Hiel, Van Hal, and Van Dongen (2019). It was also found that the extensive use of social media by family members leads them to the communication gap among them and other relatives, and neighbours. The parents in the held discussions reported that nowadays, many youngsters who use social media are getting bereft of moral behaviour and do not obey their elders.

Moreover, the findings discovered that all the family members, i.e. mothers, fathers, daughters and sons, have agreed that gradually social media is creating a communication gap among them, despite the fact that traditional social values and interpersonal communication settings among those families are still prevailing among them

## 7. Conclusion

In a sequel, the findings of this study illuminated that most of the families in Latifabad, Hyderabad prefer to have communication in interpersonal communication settings. Additionally, it revealed that the majority of the family members use social media through smartphones, tabs and laptops. Henceforth, a communication gap had gradually been created among such the middle class families who were users of social media.

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