

IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INFLUENCERS ON FAMILY FUNCTIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING SELF-REPORTED QUESTIONNAIRE

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of social networks and influencers on family functioning, with a particular focus on how these external influences affect family communication and economic stability. We explore the associations between family members' purchasing behaviors—prompted by influencers—and the communication patterns within families, specifically between parents and children. A quantitative questionnaire was used to examine how products and services promoted by influencers affect family dynamics and communication patterns concerning social networks. Family functioning was assessed using the McMaster Family Functioning Scale, supplemented by the Economic Strain Scale to evaluate financial stress within families. The sample comprised 93 respondents, with significant correlations found between parent-child communication about social networks and family roles. Economic strain emerged as a key factor influencing both social network usage and interactions with influencers. The results underscore that increased family communication predicts higher social network usage within families, while economic strain plays a pivotal role in influencing both the consumption of social network content and interactions with influencers. The findings suggest that social networks and influencers have a profound effect on family functioning, often impairing family dynamics and overall well-being. Economic strain and diminished communication appear to exacerbate the negative impacts, highlighting the need for greater awareness of the potential risks posed by these external influences on families.

Keywords: Family functioning, social media usage, influencers, parent-child interaction, economic strain

1 Introduction

The influence of social media on human behavior has become a focal point of research in recent years. Despite widespread interest, there is limited research exploring how social media affects family dynamics, particularly in the Slovak context. This study aims to bridge that gap by investigating the impact of social networks and influencers on family functioning in Slovakia.

Previous research has highlighted the substantial role influencers play in shaping consumer lifestyles. For instance, Nadányiová et al. (2020) found that influencers significantly impact the consumer habits of Slovak individuals, particularly those under the age of 35. Building on this, our study focuses on parents, following Nikken's (2017) findings, which indicate that parents' media habits are key predictors of their children's social media usage. We hypothesize that parents' social network behaviors may similarly influence their children's engagement with social networks and influencers. Family functioning is a well-established determinant of personal development and intra-family relationships (Bočková et al., 2024). Roman et al. (2015) define family functioning as the capacity of family members to communicate effectively, maintain relationships, make decisions, and resolve conflicts collectively. Healthy family dynamics, as noted by Atkin et al. (2015), reduce the time children spend on digital devices, suggesting that a stable family environment can mitigate the excessive use of social media.

Research by Huisman et al. (2012) and Blinn-Pike (2009) underscores the complex effects of technology on family life, noting that while digital devices can facilitate connection, they also introduce new sources of conflict. Further, Capri et al. (2019) found that lower digital consumption within families correlates with better family functioning, whereas higher consumption leads to dysfunction, particularly when both parents and children engage excessively with digital devices. Given the potential for social media influencers to affect decision-making, attitudes, and behavior which was proven in

case of television (Lappiere et al., 2020), this study seeks to answer several research questions, including how influencer exposure affects family communication and purchasing behavior. This exploratory study contributes to the growing body of literature by focusing on the family unit, examining both the positive and negative consequences of social media use and influencer interaction.

To better define social media influencers, Haugtvedt et al. (2005) describe them as individuals with hundreds to millions of followers on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Snapchat. According to Amato et al. (2016), online social networks allow influencers to share their lives with their followers. Of particular relevance to our study is the claim by van Lappiere et al. (2007), who argue that television influencers can affect consumerism, decision-making, opinion, attitude, and behavior. Therefore, further research in this area is essential to fully understand the power of Internet celebrities.

Therefore, we postulate research questions:

RQ1: Which family functions appear to be related to greater exposure to social network use versus increased exposure to influencer interaction?

RQ2: Does following influencers affect family buying behavior?

RQ3: How is communication with children about social networks related to the functions of families?

RQ5: Which of the subscales of family functions significantly predicts an increased percentage of exposure to social networks?

RQ6: Which of the subscales of family functions significantly predicts the increased percentage of exposure to interacting with influencers?

2 Methods

This study utilized a quantitative research design, employing a self-report questionnaire to explore the relationship between social networks, influencers, and family functioning. The questionnaire aimed to capture sociodemographic information and assess several key variables, including family functioning, economic strain, purchasing behaviors influenced by social networks, and communication about social media use within the family.

The study sample consisted of 93 respondents, all of whom were parents. The participants were recruited through non-profit organizations, ensuring diverse representation across sociodemographic backgrounds. Sociodemographic data collected included age, gender, number of children, children's ages, and marital status.

The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software (version 25.0). Pearson's correlation was used to explore relationships between family functioning, social network usage, influencer interaction, and economic strain. Linear regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of increased social network use and interactions with influencers. To ensure adequate statistical power, a power analysis was conducted using GPower software (version 3.1.9.7), which indicated that 91 respondents were required to achieve a power of 0.8. The final sample size of 93 respondents was deemed sufficient for the analysis.

The questionnaires were distributed both online and in person through non-profit organizations. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the surveys at their convenience. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in handling their data.

The first scale we employed was the McMaster Family Functioning Scale, developed by Epstein et al. (1983), which assesses the functioning of the family unit. This scale consists of

six dimensions; for our purposes, we used the following subscales: problem-solving ($\alpha=0.64$), communication ($\alpha=0.56$), roles ($\alpha=0.47$), affective responsiveness ($\alpha=0.82$), and behavior control ($\alpha=0.62$). We used a 4-point scale (1=strongly agree; 4=strongly disagree). The overall McMaster Family Functioning Scale had a reliability of ($\alpha=0.83$).

To examine the economic functioning of the family, we employed the Economic Strain Scale, developed by Hilton and Devall (1997). This scale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale (1=never; 5=almost always), with a reliability coefficient of ($\alpha=0.92$).

To assess purchasing behavior, we asked the question: "How often did you or someone in your family purchase an item or rent a service that was promoted by an influencer?" Respondents answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1=never; 5=almost always). To explore communication about social networks, we asked respondents: "How often do you discuss with your child/children what they follow on social networks?" Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale (1=never; 5=almost always). Finally, we included two additional questions: "How much time do you spend on social networks per day?" and "What percentage of your time on social networks do you spend watching influencers and their content?"

3 Results

RQ1: Which family functions appear to be related to greater exposure to social network use versus increased exposure to influencer interaction?

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships between family functions and both social network usage and interaction with influencers. The results indicated that increased time spent on social networks is significantly correlated with impaired family communication ($r = 0.225, p < 0.05$), disrupted family roles ($r = 0.247, p < 0.05$), overall family functioning ($r = 0.249, p < 0.05$), and heightened economic strain ($r = 0.349, p < 0.01$). Additionally, interaction with influencers was correlated with behavioral control ($r = 0.263, p < 0.05$) and economic strain ($r = 0.266, p < 0.05$). These results suggest that increased exposure to social networks and influencers tends to worsen family dynamics and increase financial stress as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation matrix between the subjective percentual perception of spending daily time on social media per day and the interaction with influencers in association with family functions and economic strain.

Variables	SMU (% per day)	Interaction with influencer (% per day)
Problems solving	0,137	0,143
Communication	0,225*	0,213
Roles	0,247*	0,093
Affective response	0,146	0,056
Behavior control	0,138	0,263*
Family functioning	0,249*	0,231
Economic strain	0,349**	0,266*

Note: *Own dataset*, * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$

RQ2 Does following influencers affect family buying behavior?

Our analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between the percentage of time spent on social networks and increased buying behavior related to products promoted by influencers ($r = 0.327, p < 0.01$). Similarly, the time spent interacting with influencers was positively correlated with buying behavior ($r = 0.272, p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that exposure to influencers on social media platforms drives consumer behavior within families, particularly with regard to purchasing products and services promoted by influencers.

RQ3 How is communication with children about social networks related to the functions of families?

There was a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.411, p < 0.01$) between communication with children about social network usage and overall family functioning. Increased communication was associated with improved family roles ($r = -0.422, p < 0.01$), better affective responsiveness ($r = -0.287, p < 0.05$), and reduced economic strain ($r = -0.383, p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that open communication between parents and children about social network usage may mitigate some of the negative effects of social media on family dynamics.

RQ4 How does buying behavior relate to each family feature?

Our analysis found that buying behavior promoted by influencers was significantly related to impaired family communication ($r = 0.289, p < 0.05$), disrupted family roles ($r = 0.312, p < 0.01$), increased economic strain ($r = 0.403, p < 0.001$), and overall family dysfunction ($r = 0.311, p < 0.01$). These correlations suggest that purchasing products promoted by influencers negatively affects various aspects of family functioning, particularly in families experiencing financial stress.

RQ5 Which of the subscales of family functions significantly predicts an increased percentage of exposure to social networks?

Linear regression analysis revealed two key models predicting the percentage of time spent on social networks.

Table 2: Social networks Model 1 summary

R	R2	Adj. R2	P
0,225	0,050	0,039	0,040
Predictors	Beta	t	P
Constant	8,448	1,052	0,001
Communication	1,348	0,646	0,040

Own dataset

We identified a 5 % explanation for the variable social networks exposure, which was statistically significant on a p basis < 0.05 . In terms of comparing both models, we focus on the adjusted R^2 , which compares both models better. Communication emerged as a significant predictor of social network usage, explaining 5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.050, p < 0.05$). The results indicate that poorer communication ($\beta = 1.348, p < 0.05$) leads to a 1.35% increase in time spent on social networks per day.

Table 3: Social networks Model 2 summary

R	R2	Adj. R2	P
0,349	0,122	0,111	0,001
Predictors	Beta	t	P
Constant	10,682	2,354	0,210
Economic strain	0,522	3,372	0,001

Own dataset

As table 3 shows Model 2 seems to be of better quality in the number of percent explanation of the variable percentage use of social networks by the variable economic strain, this is a 12.2% explanation, as well as a greater p value of $p < 0.01$. Comparing adjusted R^2 we found that this 0.111 model is better than Model 1. Economic strain was a stronger predictor, explaining 12.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.122, p < 0.01$). The analysis revealed that higher levels of economic strain ($\beta = 0.522, p < 0.01$) were associated with a 0.52% increase in time spent on social networks.

RQ6: Which of the subscales of family functions significantly predicts the increased percentage of exposure to interacting with influencers?

Table 4: Influencers Model 1 summary

R	R2	Adj. R2	P
0,263	0,069	0,052	0,049
Predictors	Beta	t	P
Constant	-2,742	-0,327	0,745
Behavioral control	0,832	0,263	0,049

Own dataset

Table 4 shows that this model explains 6.9% of the variable interaction with influencers. The model is significant on a $p < 0.05$ basis. Equally, adjusted R^2 we will apply this to a specific comparison of models. Behavioral control was a significant predictor, explaining 6.9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.069$, $p < 0.05$). Poorer behavioral control ($\beta = 0.832$, $p < 0.05$) was associated with a 0.83% increase in interaction with influencers.

Table 5: Influencers Model 2 summary

R	R2	Adj. R2	P
0,266	0,071	0,056	0,044
Predictors	Beta	t	P
Constant	5,766	1,339	0,186
Economic strain	0,25	2,043	0,04

Own dataset

As tables 8 shows Model 2 is slightly better than Model 1 within the adjusted R^2 . This model explains 7.1% of the variable with a significant $p < 0.05$. Likewise, we conclude that this model is better within the adjusted R^2 than Model 1. Economic strain again emerged as a significant predictor, explaining 7.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.071$, $p < 0.05$). Higher economic strain ($\beta = 0.295$, $p < 0.05$) was associated with a 0.30% increase in interaction with influencers

4 Discussion

Consistent with previous research (Huisman et al., 2012; Capri et al., 2019), this study found that increased time spent on social networks is associated with impaired family functioning. Specifically, we observed significant correlations between social network use and diminished family communication, disrupted roles, and heightened economic strain. These findings align with the notion that excessive digital engagement reduces the quality of family interactions and can exacerbate financial stress (Blinn-Pike, 2009; Pellerone et al., 2019). Families that engage heavily in social media use, particularly when it involves influencers, may experience a breakdown in traditional family roles and responsibilities, as well as an erosion of effective communication.

One of the more striking findings of this study is the significant impact of influencers on family purchasing behaviors. Similar to prior studies (Nadályiová et al., 2020; Lappieri et al., 2020), our data indicate that influencers play a substantial role in shaping consumer habits within families, with increased interaction with influencers correlating with more frequent purchases of promoted products and services. This suggests that influencers not only affect individual consumer behavior but also have the potential to influence entire family units.

The correlation between buying behavior and family functioning further emphasizes the potential consequences of influencer-driven consumption. Families that frequently purchase items promoted by influencers reported higher levels of economic strain, impaired communication, and disrupted family roles. We assume that influencers also have some influence on sociopathological phenomena that occur in schools. According to qualitative research by; Jarmoch et al. (2022) on a sample of students, they found that the current sociopathological phenomenon in Slovak schools is alcohol and soft drugs such as marijuana. Therefore, it is very necessary to address the issue of influence and responsibility for the content created by influencers on social networks. We expect similar behavior from parents of children. These findings suggest that the commercial pressures of social networks extend beyond individual consumption to impact broader family dynamics. As financial resources become strained, family relationships may suffer, leading to conflicts and reduced overall well-being. This underscores the importance of understanding the far-reaching effects of influencers, particularly in families already facing economic challenges (Higashi et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2020). Interestingly, our study also highlights the protective role of communication within the family. Greater communication about

social network use was associated with improved family functioning, including better role distribution, affective responsiveness, and reduced economic strain. These findings are consistent with previous research (Procentese et al., 2019; Osenica Kostić et al., 2022), which suggests that open communication within families can mitigate some of the negative effects of social media and technology use.

In particular, parents who actively engage in conversations with their children about their social media consumption seem to foster healthier family environments. This suggests that promoting open dialogue about social media may serve as a buffer against the negative impacts of social network usage and influencer interactions. Our findings indicate that improving family communication could reduce the time spent on social networks, which in turn may help alleviate some of the negative consequences associated with excessive digital engagement (Tadpatrikar et al., 2021).

The relationship between behavioral control and interaction with influencers was another significant finding of this study. Families with poorer behavioral control reported higher levels of interaction with influencers, suggesting that a lack of structure and oversight within the family may contribute to increased exposure to external influences. This aligns with the work of Wallace (2022), who found that parents who actively monitor and limit their children's social media use can help reduce the time spent on such platforms.

The content promoted by influencers—ranging from lifestyle choices to risky behaviors—can have a significant influence on younger family members, particularly in families with lower levels of behavioral control. Future research should explore this connection further, particularly with regard to the potential influence of influencers on problematic behaviors such as substance use and risky consumerism within the family context. Despite the insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 93 participants, though sufficient for statistical power, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to replicate this study with a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the robustness of the results. Additionally, our study did not explore gender and marital status differences in depth, which could provide valuable insights into how these factors interact with social network usage and family dynamics.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias related to social desirability or inaccurate reporting. Future research could benefit from employing mixed-method approaches, including qualitative interviews or observational studies, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics in the digital age. Furthermore, qualitative exploration of predictors such as behavioral control could provide deeper insights into how and why these factors influence social network usage and interaction with influencers.

5 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that social networks and influencers can profoundly influence family functioning, particularly in terms of communication, economic strain, and family roles. Our findings suggest that excessive use of social media, especially interaction with influencers, is associated with impaired family dynamics, contributing to economic stress and disrupting traditional family roles. The results emphasize the dual role of social networks: while they provide a platform for connectivity and information, they also pose risks to family well-being, particularly when engagement with influencers promotes consumerism that exacerbates financial strain. This impact on family economic conditions is significant, as it can lead to further deterioration in communication and relationships within the family unit. However, the study also highlights the importance of open communication as a protective factor. Families that engage in regular discussions about social network usage—particularly between parents and children—appear to

mitigate some of the negative impacts of social media. Enhanced communication not only improves family functioning but also reduces the time spent on social networks, potentially curbing the influence of external factors such as influencers.

Given the far-reaching effects of social networks and influencers, it is critical that future research continues to explore these dynamics, particularly with a focus on economic strain and behavioral control. Further investigation into how these factors affect family well-being will provide a deeper understanding of how to mitigate the negative impacts and promote healthier family environments in the digital age. In conclusion, while social networks offer numerous benefits, their influence on family life should be carefully monitored. Families, policymakers, and educators must work together to foster healthier digital habits and ensure that social media usage does not come at the cost of family cohesion and well-being. Promoting open communication, media literacy, and responsible consumption of digital content will be essential steps toward protecting family functioning in an increasingly digital world.

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Primary Paper Section: A

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