

The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Parents' Beliefs

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Introduction

Many new parents, especially new ones, seek support, advice, and understanding and often find this through social media. Current research lacks information on how social media has affected and influenced parenting.

- New mothers reported spending approximately three hours daily on the internet (McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2011).
- Mothers who reported being diagnosed with Postpartum Depression (PPD) reported higher rates of social media use (Morris, 2014).

With mothers spending three hours daily on social media and reporting higher rates of PPD, this calls to question how attentive parents are to their children while social media is used.

- When mothers have reported more of their friends are family members or relatives on Facebook, they had more satisfaction within the parenting role.

Social support from family or friends is important for adjustment to parenthood, and Facebook has been found to be a way for individuals to build social capital (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, & Dush, 2012).

This study investigates how social media use relates to parents' beliefs.

Method

Participants

All parents were 18 or older and had a child between the ages of 0-18, recruited through social media groups, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and flyers.

- **Sample:** N = 183 parents
- **Parent age:** $M = 32.7$ ($SD = 6.69$)
- **Parent:** mothers (86.7%) fathers (13.3%)
- **Ethnicity:** White (75.1%) Hispanic (9.9%) Asian/Pacific Islander (9.4%) African American (5.0%) Other (.6%)
- **Household income:** \$50,000 or less (35%) \$51,000 or more (65%)
- **Education:** High school (6.6%) some college (15.5%) trade/vocational training (6.1%) associate's degree (11.6%) baccalaureate degree (38.7%) graduate degree (21.5%)
- **Number of children:** 2 or less (80.1%) between 3 and 5 (19.8)
- **Marital Status:** married (80.2%) In a relationship (12.1%) single (4.9%) Divorced (2.7%)

Measures

- Social Media Use Survey (Cook & Paradis, 2016) asked "On average, approximately how often do you check Facebook?"
- Parental Beliefs Survey (Luster, 1985; Luster, 1986); six subscales:
 1. **Spoiling** – the belief that it is possible to spoil children.
 2. **Floor freedom** - the belief that children need to explore independently.
 3. **Discipline and control** – the belief in being authoritarian.
 4. **Talking and reading** – the belief that talking and reading to children is important.
 5. **Contingency** - the belief that parents' actions impact their children.
 6. **Competency** – the belief parents have in their parenting ability.

Procedure

- Parents took the survey online, administered through Qualtrics.

Results

Spearman correlations were conducted between social media use and each of the parental beliefs subscales.

Significant positive correlations were found between:

- **Spoiling**
($r = .17, p = .02$)
- **Discipline and control**
($r = .04, p = .54$)

Significant negative correlations were found between:

- **Floor freedom**
($r = -.11, p = .16$)
- **Talking and reading**
($r = -.29, p < .01$)
- **Contingency**
($r = -.19, p = .01$)

There was no significant correlation between competency and high social media use.

Discussion

Results indicate social media and parenting beliefs are related. Specifically, concern with spoiling, talking and reading, and floor freedom increasing with greater social media use may be because parents want to justify why they are not with or being attentive to their children.

The relationship with social media use and discipline and control, i.e., being more authoritarian, may be because parents are not wanting to spend time explaining decisions to their children.

The low levels of contingency, meaning making contingent responses to their child, may be because parents want to justify their reasoning for spending time on social media and not being with their child.

Limitations

- Due to the self-report nature of this study, parents may not have an accurate perception of how often they use social media, especially given the brief nature of use (i.e., often a few minutes at a time).
- Beliefs are not always reflected in an individual's actions.

Future Research

- One suggestion for future research is to investigate the kind of social media interactions parents are having.
- Observational studies may provide further insight as to how parents' social media use breaks/interrupts parent-child interactions.

References

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