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## Introduction

The family is the primary social institution responsible for fulfilling basic human needs and fostering deep interpersonal connections. However, structural changes and evolving social norms have introduced new challenges that families must navigate. In particular, the rise of virtual social networks has significantly impacted family dynamics, altering

# Systematic Review of Virtual Education's Impact on Family Dynamics

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The internet and virtual space are advancing and expanding at an uncontrollable pace, with all regions of the world now engaged with the internet, making life without it increasingly challenging. However, the internet also brings specific issues and challenges to the valuable institution of the family. Therefore, the present study aims to review the functions of virtual education on the family.

**Methods and Materials:** In this review study, researchers conducted a computerized search using keywords across databases including Google Scholar, ERIC, Web of Science, and Scopus. Ultimately, comprehensive data from 17 articles were utilized in this review.

**Findings:** The findings from current studies led to categorizing the topics into eight general areas: internet safety (family support for children online), family functioning and internet addiction, the impact of internet infidelity on couples and families, virtual space and the inclination toward modern and postmodern family values, virtual space and reduced family interactions, differentiation and the tendency toward virtual space with a tilt toward divorce, family-school interactions in virtual education environments, and virtual space and family physical health.

**Conclusion:** Virtual spaces, with their distinct characteristics, have a profound impact on families, bringing about social and cultural changes that many parents find difficult to fully understand. Social media introduces individuals to a wide range of lifestyles, sometimes creating conflict between family dynamics and technology. However, promoting responsible use through education and cultural initiatives can help reduce its negative effects on both families and society.

**Keywords:** Virtual space education, family, systematic review.

lifestyles, perspectives, and values. These shifts in social and cultural norms have led to changes in family interactions and their daily lives (Dehghani & Fadavi, 2021).

In modern societies, the pervasive use of digital media has led family members to spend increasing amounts of time online, often at the expense of face-to-face interactions. This shift reduces real-life communication and can weaken familial bonds, diminishing the sense of

responsibility and attachment between family members. While in-person presence and direct interaction are crucial for maintaining family cohesion, excessive media use deprives families of these opportunities (Barghi et al., 2022).

The influence of technology on family communication patterns reveals a concerning trend: the use of digital devices disrupts connections between family members. This impact extends to various aspects of family life, including leisure time, emotional well-being, and communication (Tadpatikar et al., 2021). While social media can maintain offline relationships and facilitate emotional expression, it also raises concerns about its negative effects on mental health (Alwuqaysi et al., 2024).

Family functioning hinges on communication, growth, and the ability to manage challenges. Research shows that families who limit media usage tend to exhibit stronger cohesion and functionality. Additionally, fostering strong family relationships and religious faith can help mitigate the adverse effects of excessive digital media consumption on emotional well-being and family life (Sujarwoto et al., 2023).

Although studies have explored the relationship between social media and aspects like social connections and emotional health, there is a notable gap in research regarding the impact of digital media on family functioning (Alwuqaysi et al., 2024). Understanding how the internet reshapes family structures and interactions remains an emerging area of inquiry (Longo, 2023).

Given the importance of family functioning in mental health and well-being, it is critical to investigate how digital media use influences these areas. Communication technologies present both opportunities and challenges for families, affecting their relationships and day-to-day lives in profound ways. These concerns are universal, impacting families across various societies and cultures, not just within specific communities.

Despite the growing body of research on digital media's effects, few studies specifically address its educational impact on families in virtual spaces. A review of the literature on this topic could provide a valuable framework for policymakers and family counselors, guiding the development of targeted interventions and

educational programs aimed at promoting healthier digital habits. Such efforts could help mitigate the negative consequences of technology on families, offering tools for better managing its influence on daily life.

This study, by reviewing research related to the functions of virtual space education on families, offers a framework for readers to simultaneously benefit from the results of multiple studies on the subject. It is anticipated that an estimation of the variables related to the research topic can assist policymakers and family counselors in designing appropriate interventions and training programs to promote correct and optimal usage of this space. This could help shield families and society to some extent from its adverse consequences.

## Methods and Materials

This review study aimed to examine interventions related to enhancing marital intimacy among married individuals. The researcher utilized relevant keywords to extract articles from databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Web of Science, and Scopus, focusing on studies published between 2021 and 2024. To ensure a global perspective, the review included both English and non-English-language studies, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the topic across different cultural contexts. Out of an initial pool of 50 studies, 10 duplicate articles and 14 that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

The inclusion criteria encompassed research, analytical-descriptive, and review articles related to the functions of virtual space education on families. Ultimately, 17 full-text articles were reviewed, and their data were extracted. The findings were reported in the form of a review article, categorized into eight general themes.

Ethical considerations and general standards for publishing were fully adhered to by the authors of this study, including avoiding plagiarism, data fabrication, data falsification, or distortion, as well as refraining from simultaneous submission of the manuscript to multiple journals.

**Table 1***PRISMA Flow Diagram*

| Stage          | Details   |
|----------------|---|
| Identification | Records identified through database searching (n = 50)<br>Google Scholar<br>ERIC<br>Web of Science<br>Scopus                          |
| Screening      | Records after duplicates removed (n = 40)<br>Records screened (n = 40)<br>Records excluded (n = 14) (did not meet inclusion criteria) |
| Eligibility    | Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 26)<br>Full-text articles excluded (n = 9) (did not meet inclusion criteria)         |
| Included       | Studies included in the review (n = 17)   |

## Findings and Results

This review categorizes the literature into eight themes, each reflecting different aspects of virtual space education's impact on families. Key findings include the need for active parental guidance to ensure internet safety for children (3 studies), the role of positive family dynamics in preventing internet addiction (5 studies), and the negative effects of online infidelity on marital trust (4 studies). Additionally, the introduction of new media is linked to shifts toward modern family values (3 studies), while increased digital space use reduces family interactions (4 studies). Other themes address the role of low family differentiation in marital conflicts and divorce (3 studies), the influence of digital technologies on family-school interactions (2 studies), and the relationship between internet use and family physical health (2 studies). Each theme includes quantifiable metrics that highlight the prevalence and consistency of these findings across the reviewed studies.

### 1. Internet Safety (Family Support for Children Online)

Internet safety plays a crucial role in fostering the physical, medical, and psychological well-being of children and adolescents. Given the growing necessity of internet and screen use in daily life, widespread access through devices such as mobile phones, laptops, and gaming systems has significantly increased children's exposure to these platforms (Saenger & Rosen, 2023).

In virtual social realities, children face new forms of harassment that are often beyond parental supervision. There is limited understanding of the appropriateness of these spaces for different age groups and the protective measures available. Parents familiar with virtual social

realities often suggest lower minimum age requirements and are more likely to permit unsupervised use. To safeguard their children, parents adopt various protective strategies tailored to the age and maturity of the child. For this reason, parents need guidance in selecting effective and appropriate mediation tools (Fiani et al., 2024).

### 2. Family Functioning and Internet Addiction

Dysfunctional family relationships, such as conflicts between parents and adolescents, can lead to internet addiction in teenagers. Family support, especially maternal support and the quality of the mother-child relationship, plays a preventive role in this issue. Families that fail to provide adequate social support place their children at risk of addictive behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and internet misuse.

There is a reciprocal relationship between family problems and a tendency toward unhealthy technology use, potentially creating a vicious cycle. Enhancing emotional capacity and behavior regulation within families reduces the likelihood of internet addiction among children (Rezazadeh et al., 2022). Additionally, positive family functioning serves as a boundary condition for certain personality traits.

Educating adolescents about the concept of family and the environment in which they grow can act as a protective factor against internet addiction. Addressing not only individual factors such as personality traits but also environmental factors, such as the importance of positive family functioning as a socializing agent, is crucial for preventing internet addiction among teenagers (Nwifo & Ike, 2024).

### **The Impact of Internet Infidelity on Couples and Families**

Virtual infidelity or online relationships outside of marriage can severely damage trust between spouses, leading to emotional and marital problems, and even divorce. These relationships often create a false and fleeting intimacy that individuals perceive as unique and special. Online infidelity results in loss of trust, emotional turmoil, conflicting feelings, shock and anger, and internal struggles over ending or continuing the relationship, all of which deeply affect couples and families (Shakiba & Esmailpour, 2023).

Moreover, the duration of the marriage is a weak predictor of marital infidelity. Excessive presence in virtual spaces can either signify infidelity or act as a contributing factor, facilitating a tendency toward infidelity (Baboo & Mohammadi, 2021).

### **Virtual Space and the Inclination Toward Modern and Postmodern Family Values**

The introduction of new media into households has the potential to transform family values and relationships, weakening the traditional boundaries of family life. In the past, individual identity was shaped by physical location and face-to-face interactions within small, confined environments, making traditional family values more enduring. However, with the advent of new media such as the internet and social networks, the role of location in identity formation has diminished, exposing individuals to diverse and modern sources of identity formation. This shift poses fundamental challenges to traditional values, particularly those centered around the family (Barghi et al., 2022).

### **Virtual Space and Reduced Family Interactions**

The widespread adoption of new communication tools, particularly in the form of social media, has significantly influenced the frequency and quality of interactions among family members. One of the primary concerns regarding the use of virtual spaces, especially social networks, is the experience of social isolation. This means that the more individuals spend time establishing online connections and sharing their daily lives in virtual spaces, the less time they dedicate to interacting with one another in the physical world.

Consequently, one of the key impacts of increased virtual space usage within families is a reduction in the quality time spent together. Studies show that as the use of virtual spaces within a family increases, family

interactions decrease, and the social capital associated with family bonds diminishes (Moharebi et al., 2023).

### **Differentiation and the Tendency Toward Virtual Spaces with a Tilt Toward Divorce**

An individual's level of differentiation from their family of origin plays a significant role in future communication patterns and interactions, especially in marital life. Low differentiation, resulting from excessive enmeshment with the family of origin, can lead to anxiety, incompatibility, and marital conflicts. Individuals with lower levels of differentiation tend to avoid, distance themselves, or sever relationships in emotionally stressful situations, which may lead to divorce.

Moreover, internet use and engagement with virtual networks exacerbate marital problems, infidelity, and divorce. Dysfunctional families, due to flawed communication patterns, face internal issues and exhibit limited dialogue, making them more inclined to turn to virtual spaces. This reduces marital satisfaction and increases the likelihood of divorce (Alavi & Mahoor, 2023).

### **Family-School Interaction in Virtual Education Environments**

Digital technologies significantly impact family-school interactions, presenting both challenges and opportunities. These technologies enhance creativity, attention to individual differences, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital skills in students. Virtual education provides an opportunity for personal growth, self-esteem, and individual abilities, as it fosters increased interaction between parents and teachers.

However, greater control by families and schools can limit students' curiosity and self-directed learning. Family-school interaction via digital technology can promote empathy, trust, enduring friendships, and students' adaptability, thereby improving the quality of their academic life. Such interaction is essential for achieving educational goals (Alamolhoda, 2023).

### **Virtual Spaces and Family Physical Health**

There is a causal relationship between internet use and physical fitness behavior, with evidence of a correlation between the two. Internet use contributes to an increase in fitness-related activities, although it also presents a competitive relationship between time spent online and time dedicated to physical fitness.

Additionally, social capital and perceived health risks act as functional mechanisms of internet usage that influence fitness behavior. Notably, the mediating effect of perceived mental health risks is stronger than that of social capital. Developing a more effective smart, informative, and digital public sports service system through the enrichment and optimization of sports media and internet facilitation is a theoretical and

practical issue requiring attention in the future (Zhang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, research has shown that persistent and novel internet usage has overall and direct effects on depressive symptoms. However, only sustained internet use indirectly impacts depressive symptoms significantly through structural social capital (Jing et al., 2023).

**Table 2**

*Functions of Virtual Space Education on Families*

| No. | Researcher(s)                          | Year | Functions of Virtual Space Education on Families  |
|-----|--|------|---|
| 1   | Alwuqaysi, Abdulrahman & Burgo         | 2024 | This study examined how social media affects mental health and family functioning in Saudi Arabia. The findings emphasized the need for culturally appropriate interventions to address these challenges, considering diverse demographic needs.  |
| 2   | Fiani et al.                           | 2024 | Parents familiar with virtual social realities tend to propose a lower minimum age for their children and are more likely to allow unsupervised access to virtual social realities.   |
| 3   | Nwifo & Ike                            | 2024 | Family functioning is negatively correlated with internet addiction among adolescents, indicating that improving family functioning is a valuable tactic for reducing adolescents' susceptibility to personality-related internet addiction.  |
| 4   | Moharebi, Hashemianfar & Hejazi        | 2023 | The extent of virtual space usage can affect and diminish identity and family values.   |
| 5   | Alamolhoda                             | 2023 | This study highlighted that virtual education enhances family-school interaction, with educational opportunities being the most significant benefit and costs being the biggest challenge. Equitable distribution of educational activities between parents and teachers, along with improving family-school interaction patterns within the limited capacities of digital technologies, must also be considered. |
| 6   | Zhang et al.                           | 2023 | A significant correlation exists between internet use and fitness behavior, with internet use promoting increased physical fitness. However, a competitive relationship exists between internet usage time and fitness time.  |
| 7   | Alavi & Mahoor                         | 2023 | Differentiation and virtual space are linked to family health and the tendency toward divorce.  |
| 8   | Jing et al.                            | 2023 | Continuous and novel internet use showed overall and direct effects on depressive symptoms. However, only continuous use had a significant indirect effect on depressive symptoms through structural social capital.  |
| 9   | Barghi, Adlipour & Papaz               | 2022 | The duration of membership, frequency of use, and users' trust in the content of social media networks influence tendencies toward family values.   |
| 10  | Rezazadeh, Fathian Dastgerdi & Heidari | 2022 | A significant relationship exists between family functioning dimensions and internet addiction. Higher levels of role-playing ability, emotional support, emotional intimacy, and behavior control in families correlate with lower internet addiction among children.  |
| 11  | Baboo & Mohammadi                      | 2021 | A difference exists between internet addicts and regular users in their tendency toward infidelity, with addicts showing a higher inclination toward infidelity. No gender differences in infidelity tendencies were observed.  |
| 12  | Dehghani & Fadavi                      | 2021 | Virtual social networks have both positive and negative social consequences for families.   |

## Discussion and Conclusion

The functions of virtual space education on families were examined across eight levels. Given the importance of the family, it is crucial to implement long-term planning to educate and enhance the positive roles of virtual spaces within families. Virtual spaces are a modern phenomenon with unique characteristics, making it challenging for many parents to have the time, ability, or sufficient knowledge to fully understand this space and its applications in the social and cultural transformations that fundamentally affect families.

Parents often lack adequate familiarity with this space, while adolescents, youth, and even children are increasingly drawn to it. This has created a private and confidential environment at home, where children can

access diverse content, sometimes including inappropriate websites, without external oversight or concern.

Virtual social networks have numerous advantages and disadvantages. A lack of comprehensive understanding of these networks can lead to harm for families. Interactions and family relationships influenced by the internet grow, and if families function appropriately, individuals will develop healthily. Such families resolve their issues collaboratively and effectively, maintain strong emotional bonds, distribute roles equitably, exercise moderate control over one another, especially their children, and communicate openly and comfortably.

Virtual social networks, by undermining past values and traditions and internalizing new norms and values within family members, make them prone to adopting



new behaviors. In other words, media impacts the ways individuals communicate and interact with each other. With their options, diversity, and variety of formats, virtual social networks familiarize individuals with different and new lifestyles.

Therefore, warm and intimate family relationships often clash with technology, as these two are fundamentally at odds, like fire and water. However, through proper education and cultural efforts to promote appropriate and optimal usage, families and societies can be partially safeguarded from the negative consequences of these networks.

One limitation of this study is that, although articles meeting the inclusion criteria were identified and reviewed, some published studies may have been overlooked due to lack of access to certain databases or full-text articles. Another limitation was the inability to access the full text of some English-language articles.

The findings of this study can be utilized in quantitative or qualitative research on the functions of virtual space education and families. Additionally, they highlight the role of various psychological, educational, and counseling interventions in improving and educating families about the role of virtual space. Comprehensive studies in this field can be developed based on these findings.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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