

PARENTING TEENAGE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: PERCEPTIONS AND PERMISSIONS AS THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

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ABSTRACT

Teens are frequent social media users, and although teens often strive for autonomy their social media use may nonetheless be supported or prohibited by their parents. This paper uses an online survey to explore how parents perceived and navigated their teen's use of social media during the early months of the pandemic. Overall, parents reported high rates of use and effective use for themselves and their teens, with parents generally supportive of teen social media use despite recognizing the potential for negative consequences and fears that their teens might be either victim or instigator of negative social media activities. Parent social media oversight most often involved interacting with teens or observing them with their awareness rather than placing direct restrictions or using monitoring software. During the early months of the pandemic, when about half of all teens were less engaged in school and social activities, parents reported that teens were generally happy, and that social media was important to their happiness. Parents tended to monitor their teens the same as they had previously, but about one-fifth reported becoming less restrictive, particularly where online time was concerned. There were some differences based on age and gender.

KEYWORDS

Social Media, Parent, Teenagers, Pandemic, Happiness, Monitoring

1. INTRODUCTION

The triadic relationship between teens, social media, and their parents is complex. Social media can be a source of positive outcomes, but also a source of peril for teens. It is well established that teenagers are heavy users of social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), with their parents potentially playing any number of mediating roles (e.g., gatekeeper, teacher, guide, co-participant, or punisher). Parents of teens are also likely to be social media users as well, but

rates of use among the adult population are not as high as they are in the teen population, and they decrease with age (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). In this study, we examine how parents in the United States perceive and monitor their teenage children's social media use, and whether the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to school closures and stay-at-home orders, led parents to adjust their social media parenting behaviors.

1.1 Parents and Social Media Oversight

Parenting teenagers can be a challenge in general, trying to balance rules and oversight while fostering independence. Social media is no exception. Although parents might prefer to avoid the stress of teens using social media, social media is omnipresent in contemporary life and thus difficult to avoid. Parents themselves often look to social media for their own purposes, which may include to support their parenting (Dennen, Jung, et al., 2021). Contemporary teens have likely experienced the phenomenon of sharenting at some point during their youth, in which parents share stories and post photos and videos of their children online. Most children are well aware of social media and have social media digital footprints long before they have social media accounts (Dennen, 2016). As children grow into tweens and teens, they tend to consider it a violation of privacy when their parents share certain types of information about them online (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). In short, teens want control over their own digital accounts and digital presence.

Parents tend to worry about teen social media use because of connections to negative behaviors (Cookingham & Ryan, 2015; Selkie et al., 2016), peer influence and pressure (Sherman et al., 2016), and mental health issues (Barry et al., 2017). Parental monitoring of social media use, starting in the pre-teen years, can lead to more positive outcomes for teens (Fardouly et al., 2018). It can also lead to frustration, with teens feeling misunderstood by adults about topics like cyberbullying, which many teens consider normal (Young & Tully, 2019). Parents may wish to intervene and help their children, who as teenagers experience fewer legal protections online than do younger children (Costello et al., 2016). However, at some point parent oversight must be relaxed, with control over online decisions ceded to the teen. Not only is it developmentally appropriate for teenagers to desire privacy and make their own social decisions, but also teens need to learn to self-regulate their online lives, which is an important digital literacy skill. This situation can prove challenging, with parents serving as a primary source of both guidance and discipline over an activity that occurs in a virtual space where parents often are not welcome.

Parental oversight can take many forms. Parents make take an autonomy-supportive approach, engaging in conversation with their child about social media even when potentially using restrictions, or a controlling approach, in which the parent dominates with their beliefs and chosen restrictions. The autonomy-supportive restrictive approach has been connected to increased prosocial behaviors (Meeus et al., 2018). When observing a teen's online activities, parents might take an authoritarian surveillance approach or a non-intrusive inspection approach (Ho et al., 2019). Whereas the former involves a deeper look into all of a teen's accounts and activities, including private messages, the later focuses on public posts. In a synthetic study of expert parenting advice in this area, Wall (2021) found that parents are primed to view social media as a high-risk behavior and encouraged to be 'vigilant' and well-informed so they can effectively guide their children in this area, with contradictory pressure to surveil and build trust with their child.

1.2 Pandemic Effects on Teen Social Media Use

In spring 2020, much of the world swiftly shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific responses to the pandemic varied by country and region, but stay at home orders were common, leaving people to increasingly rely on their phones and computers to connect with the outside world. Social media specifically provided a platform through which phones and computers could unite people, and thus has played a prominent role in pandemic life. Among its many functions have been maintaining existing social connections, developing and supporting community networks, entertainment, and crowdsourcing information at the local, national and global levels. For many people, social media was a primary way of learning how others were experiencing the pandemic and having social interactions with people outside of one's household during the first months of the pandemic.

Teenagers may have been forced into household isolation in spring 2020, but this did not mean that they lacked social interaction. For American teenagers, who were already heavy users of both mobile phones and social media pre-pandemic (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), social media networks and established patterns of use were already in place. For many teens, their social media networks and experiences are intertwined with their school networks and experiences (Dennen, Rutledge, et al., 2020; Rutledge et al., 2019). In other words, teens use social media to connect outside of school to support peer relationships and identity development (Dennen, Choi, et al., 2020). When physically in schools, where social media and mobile phone use are complex and multifaceted (Greenhow et al., 2019) and may be restricted or eschewed in favor of face-to-face interactions (Garcia, 2017), teens are likely to discuss things they have seen on social media (Dennen, Rutledge, et al., 2020; Rutledge et al., 2019). Thus, during Spring 2020, when schools at all levels shifted to emergency remote learning (Hodges et al., 2020) for the remainder of the school year as a safety precaution, high school students experienced not only an educational disruption (Colvin et al., 2022), but also a social one. School closures and isolation have been blamed for a range of ill effects on teens (Tan, 2021), and in particular teen mental health issues (Meherali et al., 2021). Other effects experienced by teens during this time include increased screen time (Ceylan et al., 2021) and sedentariness (Rossi et al., 2021).

Both teens and their parents struggled during the lockdown when they were largely limited to each other for in person social interaction. For teens, this period was marked by an increase in mental health issues and negative behaviors (Breux et al., 2021), with established family relationships moderating how these issues were internalized and externalized (Skinner et al., 2021). Social media offered a way to maintain friendships outside the household and communicate with friends during the early months of the pandemic (Dennen, Rutledge, et al., 2021a, 2021b), but its use was more situated or visible in the household than usual, where parents could directly monitor things like time spent online.

2. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate parent perspectives on and oversight of teen social media use in general, and also to explore whether it parent oversight and permissions changed during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The parent perspective is an important one for three reasons. First, parents are usually the responsible party providing teenagers with access to mobile phones and Internet service for social purposes. In this position, parents serve as

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potential technology gatekeepers. Second, contemporary parenting involves monitoring teenagers' mobile phone and social media use, along with teaching them to be responsible users (Dennen et al., 2019). Third, parents typically live and interact with teenagers daily and can offer perspectives on their teenager's activities and moods. Although a parent's report on teen attitudes and behavior is secondary data, parents are nonetheless keen observers of teen behavior. Parents are often used as a source of data about teen social media use (e.g., Wallace, 2021). Additionally, this study focuses on how parents monitor and respond to their teenager's social media use, in which case they directly self-report information. The study also focuses on teen engagement and happiness in the immediate wake of the pandemic. Of interest here is whether parents perceived that their teen's everyday life was affected by the pandemic and whether they became less restrictive about online activities as a result.

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do parents perceive levels, effectiveness, and support of social media use for themselves and their teens? Is there a relationship between parent and teen use?
2. How do parents perceive the effects of and risks related to their teens' social media behaviors?
3. Which social media monitoring and restriction behaviors are parents most likely to engage in?
4. Did parents perceive social media as an important component of teens happiness during the early months of the pandemic? Did perceptions of happiness differ by age and gender?
5. Did parents adjust their social media monitoring behaviors in the early months of the pandemic? Did parent oversight and adjustments differ by gender and age?

3. METHOD

To address the research questions, a survey study was conducted during the summer of 2020. The study was approved by the researchers' Institutional Review Board and all participants were volunteers.

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study were 641 parents or guardians of teenage children in the United States. The sample included parents representing 44 of the 50 states. Each participant reported data on up to three teenagers, with a total of 921 teenagers represented in the data set (see Table 1 for an overview of demographics). Although most respondents indicated they were female and in a mother role, the gender balance of teenagers was more even. The 4.5% of participants in the other role were stepparents, grandparents, and legal guardians. For brevity, the term parent is used throughout this study to indicate individuals in a parent or parent-like role.

Table 1. Parent Demographics

Demographic Variables	N	Percentage
Parent Gender		
Female	560	87.4%
Male	78	12.2%
Non-binary	3	0.5%
Parent Role in Family		
Mother	560	87.4%
Father	52	8.1%
Other roles	48	4.5%

Parents in the study reported on between one and three teenagers in their household (see Table 2). Although the gender split was similar, the sample overrepresents white teens when compared to the population of the United States (see Table 3). They were evenly split between younger teenagers, defined as between ages 13-15, and older teenagers, defined as between ages 16-19, with a mean age of 15.5 (SD=1.83).

Table 2. Number of Teens

Number of teens	N	%
1 teen	396	61.8%
2 teens	210	32.8%
3 teens	35	5.5%

Table 3. Teen Demographics

Demographic Variable	N	Percentage
Teen Gender		
Female	430	46.7%
Male	480	52.1%
Non-binary/unknown	11	1.2%
Teen Race		
White	691	75.0%
Black	78	8.5%
Hispanic or Latinx	56	6.1%
Asian	21	2.3%
Other races	75	8.1%
Age of Teens		
Young Teens (13-15)	482	52.3%
Older Teens (16-19)	439	47.7%

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection occurred via an online survey using the Qualtrics survey platform. All participants opted into the survey after first being presented with a study information sheet. The survey itself consisted of parent demographics, followed by a question about how many teenagers were in the parent's household. For each teenager in the household, up to a maximum of 3 teenagers, parents were asked a block of questions about the teen's demographics, the parent's oversight of the teen's social media use, and the parent's observations and perceptions of the teen's social media use. The survey was advertised to parents using paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram during July 2020. Parents could follow a link embedded in the ad to access the survey. At the conclusion of the survey participants could enter a drawing to win one of four \$25 gift cards.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on descriptive analysis of responses to answer to the survey items. Spearman rank-order correlations were used to determine if there is a relationship between level and effectiveness of social media use and discussing social media use with teens and effectiveness of teen use. Chi-square tests of independence were used to explore demographic differences across three demographic variables, parent gender, teen gender, and teen age. Teen age was grouped into younger (13-15) and older (16-19) teens (see Table 3) based on the typical legal driving age in the United States, which is 16 years old. This division was meaningful because for many teens independence is associated with driving (Scott-Parker, 2018). In another study conducted during the early period of the pandemic, teens who were able to drive reported more interactions with friends and the outside world than younger teens (Dennen, Rutledge, et al., 2021b). Logistic regression was used to explore the relationship between changes in parent monitoring and level of teen social media use

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Levels, Effectiveness, and Support of Social Media Use

Parents were asked to indicate whether they were heavy social media users and able to use social media effectively (see Figure 1) as well as whether their teens were heavy users and able to use it effectively (see Figure 2). The population skewed heavily toward agreeing that both parents and teens were heavy users, with more than 70% agreement for both populations. Nonetheless, some parents self-reported disagreement with this statement, which does not mean that they or their teens are not users, but rather that they do not perceive themselves to be heavy users. When asked about ability to use social media effectively, perceptions of effectiveness outpace perceptions of heavy use for both parents and teens. Only 15 (2.4%) of parents disagreed with their own ability to use social media effectively, and that amount rose slightly to 64 (6.9%) when responding about their teens.

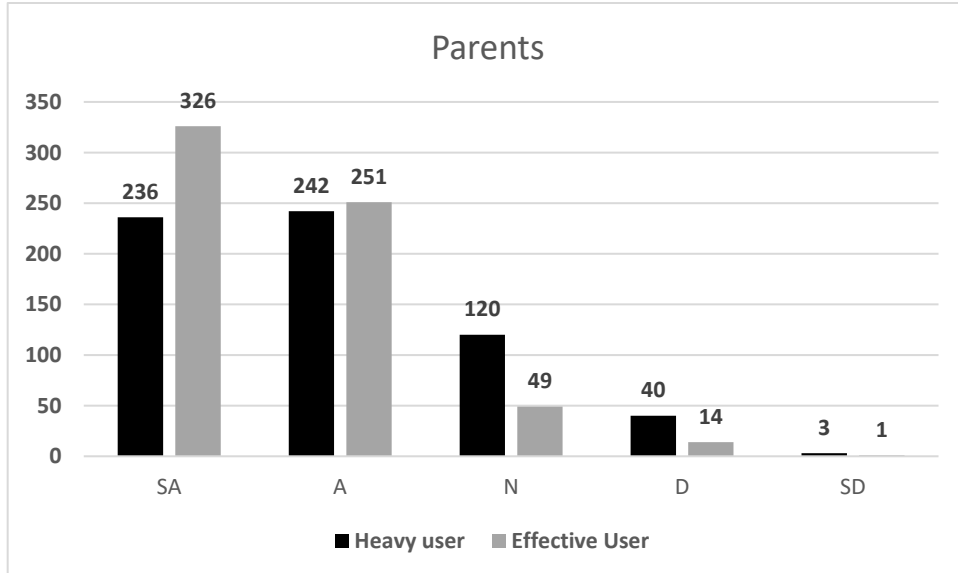


Figure 1. Parent social media use ($n = 641$)

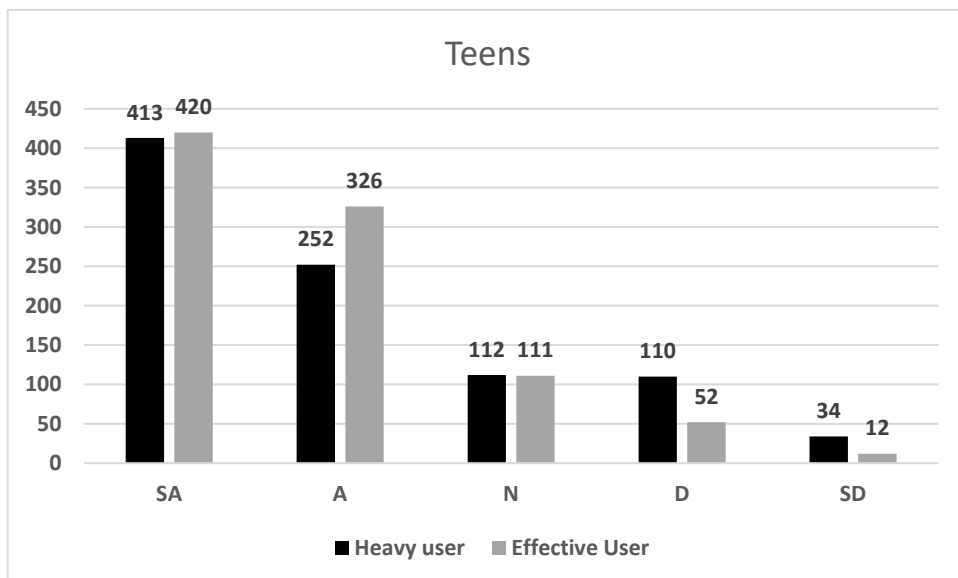


Figure 2. Teen social media use ($n = 921$)

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Most of the sample shared that they discuss social media use with their teen, as indicated in Table 4. However, the percentage shifts downward, from 87.0% to 66.3% when the question shifts to parent perceptions of how freely their teens share about social media use with their parents. Parent support of teen social media use is a bit more complicated, with parents taking a more central stance of neither agreeing nor disagreeing for almost one-third of the teens. Still, more than half of all parents view their teen’s social media use favorably.

Table 4. Parent-teen social media discussion and support ($n=921$ teens)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I discuss social media use with my teen.	405 (44.0%)	396 (43.0%)	83 (9.0%)	32 (3.5%)	5 (0.5%)
My teen freely shares about their social media use with me.	242 (26.3%)	368 (40.0%)	162 (17.6%)	128 (13.9%)	21 (2.3%)
I support my teen’s use of social media.	89 (9.7%)	462 (50.2%)	280 (30.4%)	80 (8.7%)	10 (1.1%)

We explored whether there were any relationships between these parent and teen behaviors using Spearman rank-order correlation tests. The results showed that parent heavy social media has a significant positive correlation with teen heavy social media use, $\rho(919) = .242$, $p < 0.01$. Parent effective use of social media had a significant positive correlation with teen effective use of social media, $\rho(919) = .334$, $p < 0.01$. Finally, discussing social media use with teens had a significant positive correlation with perceptions of teen effective use of social media, $\rho(919) = .282$, $p < 0.01$. Although these are all significant correlations, two are weak and one is moderate. Given the large sample size and small correlation coefficients, these significant correlations should be interpreted with caution.

4.2 Perceived Effects, Risks and Monitoring of Social Media Use

Parents were asked about positive and negative effects of social media that their teen has experienced. Figure 3 depicts parent perceptions of whether their teen has experienced positive benefits and negative consequences overall. Positive benefits were reported at a higher rate than negative consequences, but these numbers suggest that many teens experience both phenomena. For about one-quarter of the teens, parents did not perceive negative consequences of social media use, whereas for around 5% parents did not perceive any positive benefits.

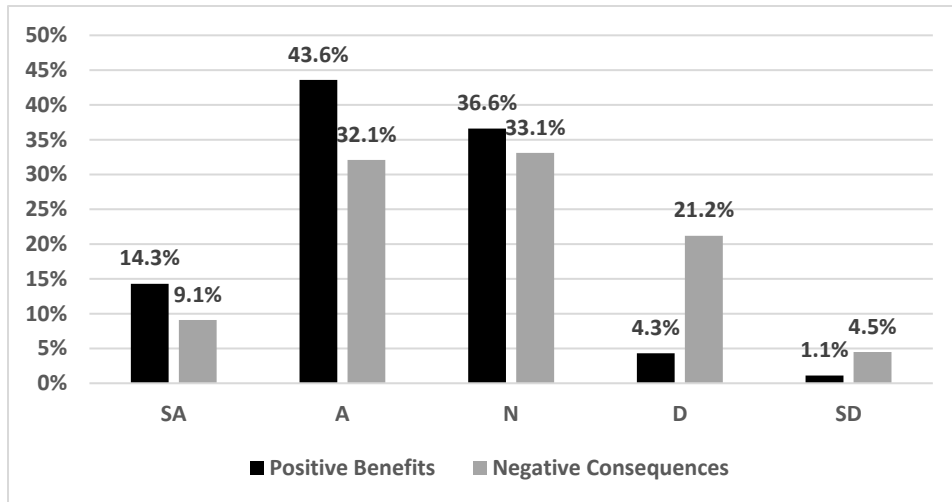


Figure 3. Parent perceptions of teens experiencing benefits and consequences

There are many potential perils associated with social media use, and parents were asked to indicate which ones were concerns for their teen (see Figure 4). Cyberbullying and predators were the most highly selected items. The least selected item, chosen in fewer than one-fourth of the responses, was that teens might document and share illegal activities (e.g., underage drinking or drug use) on social media. Further probing in this area, parents were asked whether they worried that their teens would be the instigators or victims of negative activities on social media. Fears of teens being victims outpaced fears of them being instigators, but still parents indicated a concern that their teen might instigate a negative activity in 29.2% of the responses (see Figure 5).

When asked about parent perceptions of how social media use affects their teen’s mood, the majority of parents indicated that it has neither a strong positive nor negative effect. (see Figure 6) Still, there was still a sizeable group that agreed that social media affected their teens positively (38.0%) or negatively (33.9%). This question represents overall capacity to be affected by social media, not a continuous indicator of effect.

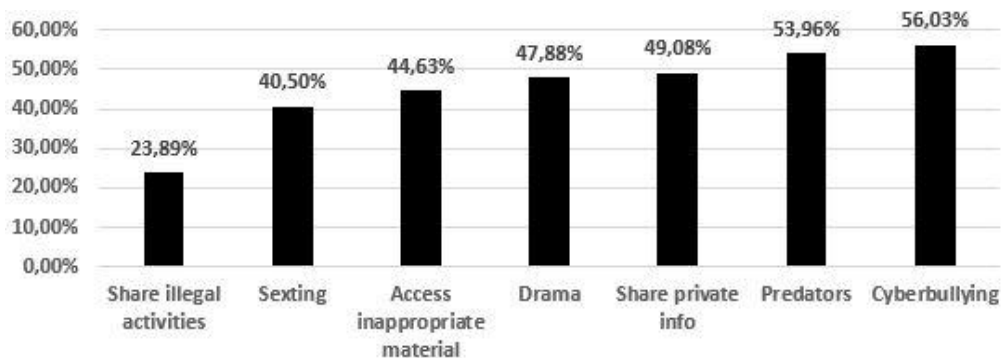


Figure 4. Parent fears about teen social media behaviors

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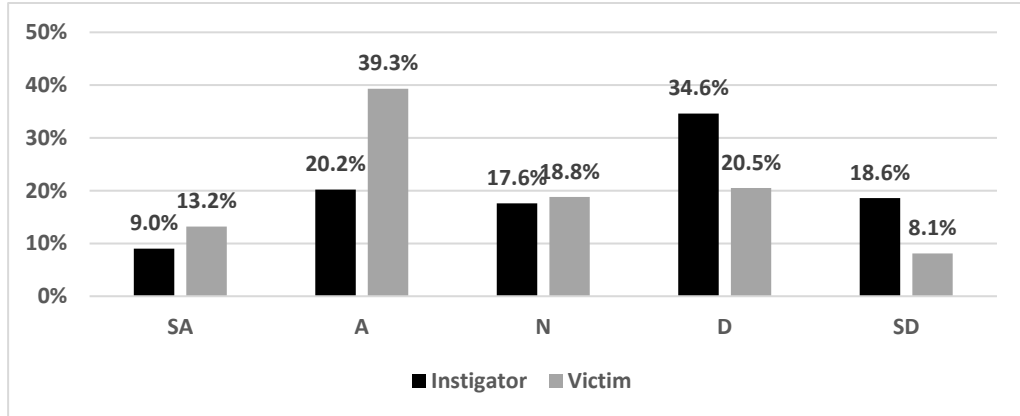


Figure 5. Parent worries about teens instigating or experiencing negative social media activity

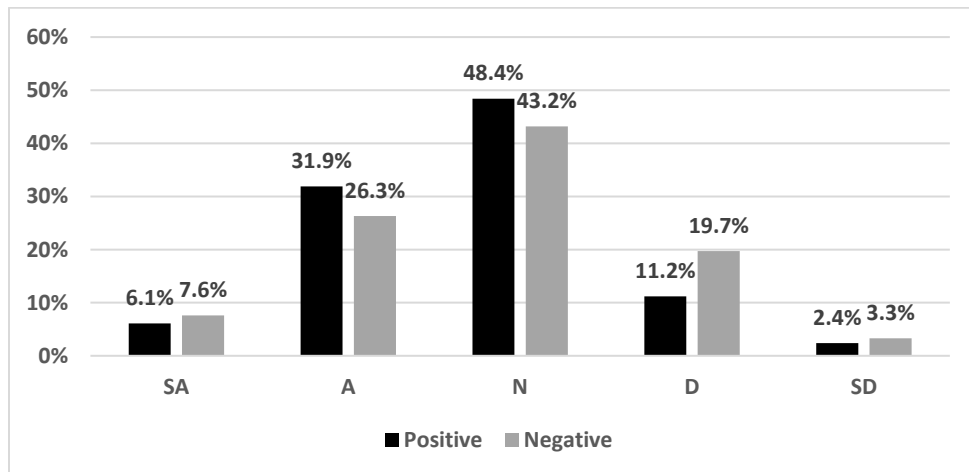


Figure 6. Parent perceptions of social media's effect on teen's mood

4.3 Monitoring and Restrictions

When asked about specific monitoring and restriction behaviors, parents most frequently indicated talking to their teens, as shown in Table 5. The number indicated here, 81.54%, is even higher than the 77.0% of parents agreeing that they discuss social media use with their teen on a question appearing earlier in the survey (see Table 4). Overt monitoring of teen social media use through having access to their phones and passwords, friending teens, or reviewing teen activities on their phone were the most frequently identified parent behaviors, whereas using software to monitor or restrict teens were the least frequent behaviors.

Table 5. Parent monitoring and restriction behaviors ($n=921$ teens)

Activity	<i>n</i>	%
Talk to my teen about social media use	751	81.54%
Have access to my teen's phone code and/or passwords	516	56.03%
Friend my teen's social media accounts	499	54.18%
Review activities on my teen's phone	447	48.53%
Restrict which apps my teen can download/use	274	29.75%
Restrict who my teen can connect with	245	26.60%
Use software to monitor my teen's whereabouts	181	19.65%
Use software to limit my teen's screentime and/or Internet access	109	11.83%
Use software to monitor my teen's screentime	100	10.86%
Use other software to restrict my teen's online activities	76	8.25%

4.4 Parent Observation of Teen Engagement and Happiness during Pandemic

Parents were asked about perceptions of teen engagement during the early months of the pandemic to determine whether parents felt their teens experienced shifts during this time, which was anticipated. Around half of the parents reported that their teens were less engaged in school and social activities during the early months of the pandemic when compared to pre-pandemic times (see Table 6). Notably, some parents perceived that their teen's engagement in school or social activities increased during this period, and less than one-third felt that their teen's engagement levels had not changed. Despite the perceived decrease in engagement for many teens, most parents reported that their teen's happiness was at a medium or high level (see Table 6). Similarly, social media was reported to be important to teen happiness during this time at either a medium or high level. A chi-square test of independence showed no differences in happiness related to teen gender or age.

Table 6. Teen engagement and happiness

	Less	Same	More
School	459 (49.8%)	231 (25.1%)	209 (22.7%)
Social	507 (55.0%)	268 (29.1%)	135 (14.7%)
	Low	Medium	High
Happiness	74 (8.0%)	366 (39.7%)	481 (52.2%)
SM Importance	83 (9.0%)	317 (34.4%)	521 (56.6%)

4.5 Changes in Parent Social Media Oversight

Parents were asked to indicate whether their social media restrictiveness and monitoring activities had changed during the early months of the pandemic. As reported in Table 7, most parents reported that their monitoring was about the same, but a sizable minority reported that they had become less restrictive during this time. When asked about specific forms of oversight, the greatest changes were reported about monitoring and restricting the amount of time teens spend online. Specifically, parents loosened their oversight with regards to time.

Table 7. Changes in parental monitoring activities

	Less restrictive	About the same	More restrictive
Parental monitoring of teen's social Monitoring	187 (20.3%)	656 (71.2%)	78 (8.5%)
	Less	About the same	More
I monitor what they post online.	101 (11%)	683 (74.2%)	137 (14.9%)
I monitor who they interact with online.	117 (12.7%)	659 (71.6%)	145 (15.7%)
I monitor how much time they spend	227 (24.6%)	527 (57.2%)	167 (18.1%)
I restrict the amount of time they spend online.	291 (31.6%)	509 (55.3%)	121 (13.1%)
I have conflict with my teen about their online activities.	153 (16.6%)	616 (66.9%)	152 (16.5%)

Chi-square tests of independence were used to examine differences based on parent gender, teen gender, and teen age (see Table 8). There was a significant relationship between parent gender and level of oversight, $\chi^2(2) = 6.403, p = .038$. The post-hoc tests showed that mothers were more likely than fathers to reduce restrictions during this time, whereas fathers were more likely than mothers to increase restrictions. For example, 24.5% of fathers increased their monitoring of with whom their teens interacted online compared to only 14.8% of mothers.

Table 8. Chi-square results of the impact of family factors on teens' social media use

	Parent χ^2 (df)	Teen χ^2 (df)	Teen age χ^2 (df)
Level of monitoring	6.403 (2)**	4.232 (2)	15.08 (***)
Monitoring activities			
I monitor what they post online.	2.939 (2)	0.972 (2)	17.263 (***)
I monitor who they interact with online.	6.729 (2)**	7.727 (2)**	26.942 (***)
I monitor how much time they spend online.	9.524 (2)**	5.812 (2)	22.801 (***)
I restrict the amount of time they spend online.	8.882 (2)**	3.706 (2)	6.569 (2)**
I have conflict with my teen about their online activities.	1.569 (2)	1.435 (2)	7.504 (2)**

Note. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

There were also significant differences in oversight based on the age of the teens, χ^2 (2) = 15.08, $p = .001$. For every item, parents were more restrictive with younger teens (age 13-15) than they were with older teens (age 16-19). Additionally, parents reported being more likely to have increased conflicts about social media use with younger teens.

Teen gender did not show significant differences when parents reported about oversight in general, χ^2 (2) = 4.232, $p = 0.12$. However, there were significant differences when focused specifically on monitoring who teens interact with. A post-hoc test showed that parents were more restrictive with daughters than they were with sons.

To explore the relationship between changes in parent monitoring and level of teen social media use, we did an ordered logistic regression. The results showed that heavy teen use of social media was significantly associated with decreased parents' oversight ($\beta = -.239$, Wald's $\chi^2 = 14.243$, $p < 0.001$). The logistic regression model indicated that parents whose teens are heavy social media users less restrictively monitored those teens during the pandemic (OR = 0.787, 95% CI = 0.696, 0.892).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Social Media Use, Effectiveness, and Parent Behaviors

The parent and teen population represented in this study both skewed toward heavy social media use, which is not entirely surprising. Parents were recruited via social media channels, and it is more likely that heavy social media users would encounter and be interested in completing the survey. Although we did not ask for greater detail, parent social media use might reflect general personal use that is typical in the adult population (e.g., social interactions, news access, entertainment) as well as parent-specific use such as discussing parenting issues (Dennen, Jung, et al., 2021) or sharenting (Latipah et al., 2020).

Teens, in general, are believed to be heavy social media users except for cases in which parents actively restrict or prohibit use, whether by discouraging it or by not providing phones and forbidding social media accounts. The high level of use found in this study was expected, even among the younger teens. Parents have long been known to lie to enable their children to have social media accounts before the age of 13 (Hargittai et al., 2011), which is the typical age requirement specified by various social networking sites in their Terms of Service. The youngest age of children we asked about in this study was 13, and we did not ask about the age at which these teens began to use social media.

The parents in this sample indicated a high rate of discussing social media use with their teens, both when asked about it in general and more specifically as a social media oversight strategy. Overall, the preference of interactive monitoring strategies (discussion, reviewing accounts) over restriction and covert surveillance supports findings from other research. Ho et al. (2019) found that while restrictions were popular when parenting children under 13, strategies shifted for parents of teens, and autonomy-supportive parenting behaviors help promote prosocial online behaviors (Meeus et al., 2018). However, it is possible that these strategies, while effective, may cause other discomforts. One study found that as parents are more involved with their child's social media use and privacy concerns they simultaneously tend to share more freely themselves (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022), suggesting a level of hypocrisy in parent behavior. Similarly, another study found that while privacy self-efficacy and concerns are not related to sharenting behavior, the presence of a supportive parenting network is (Ranzini et al., 2020). These are topics that could be explored directly in a future study of parent monitoring behaviors.

The lack of a strong correlation between parent heavy use and teen heavy use suggests that some parents who are heavy users either restrict their teen's use, which is supported by the self-reported time monitoring and restrictions in this study, or they may have teens who are not highly interested in social media. The lack of strong correlation between effective use among parents and teens, while strictly a measure of perception, suggests that parents recognize that in some cases teen knowledge surpasses their own (e.g., a digital natives argument) while in others they do not yet believe their teens to be able to execute good judgment. Overall, parents appear to be navigating a complex space. They know that their teens experience social media in positive and negative ways, and see social media use as a phenomenon connected to happiness for many teens. They are existing between the space normative expectations and practical limitations, and of wanting to protect their children and provide them with the freedom to self-regulate (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018).

5.2 Pandemic Shifts

In terms of pandemic effects, these findings suggest that parents recognized that their teens were less engaged in typical school and social media activities. Although most parents did not feel that their teens experienced a dip in happiness, they nonetheless recognized the importance of social media to their teens for maintaining social connections during a stressful time. These findings were corroborated by teens in a parallel survey study (Dennen, Rutledge, et al., 2021a) and are consistent with another study that found both parents and teens experienced increased reliance on social media during the early pandemic (Drouin et al., 2020). Parents responded accordingly by either relaxing their oversight, including time restrictions, or by maintaining the status quo.

Finally, lower rates of restriction and monitoring were associated with heavier teen social media use, at least in terms of parental perceptions. The many parents who reported no change in their oversight behaviors combined with the association between less restrictive parents and higher teen social media use implies that prior to the pandemic they had already established effective ways of parenting their teens related to social media use. In this sense, the term *effective* is relative and assumes that whatever arrangement was in place pre-pandemic balanced factors like safety, maturity level, and parent-child conflict in a manner that led to satisfactory outcomes.

In the roughly 30% of cases in which parent monitoring changed, we did not collect data that explains the change. However, various explanations can be considered. In cases where parents and teens experienced greater togetherness at home, parent exposure to teen behaviors may have increased. In particular, this phenomenon may explain the significant difference based on parent gender, which somewhat challenges findings from a pre-pandemic study which suggest that mothers are more engaged in social media monitoring (Wallace, 2021). During the pandemic, an increase in parents working at home may have given fathers greater exposure than usual to their teen's online behaviors. This awareness may have led them to try to enact new limits.

Conversely, parents who previously enforced restrictions and monitored teen use closely may have been too tired to continue this practice or may have swiftly concluded that the benefits outweighed the risks of allowing their teens to use social media and to have privacy while they use it. Without social media during this time, important peer interactions may have been lost, delaying the continuous development of interpersonal skills and social competencies (Hussong et al., 2021). Given the frequent perception that social media was contributing to teen happiness, this is a logical conclusion. It is also supported by findings from another study in which parents reported that they think monitoring teen social media use is a good idea, but they are uncertain of their efficacy as monitors (Douglas et al., 2020). Alternately, after spending more time together than usual some parents may have concluded that restrictions were not necessary, mimicking Bulow et al.'s (2021) finding that behavioral controls were ceded to autonomy in some instances during this time. This potential interpretation first with other research on the effectiveness of restrictive autonomy-supportive parenting in supporting prosocial social media behavior for teens (Meeus et al., 2018). In this approach, parents help teens understand and perhaps participate in the decision-making process. If formerly restrictive parents use autonomy-supportive approaches, the end result may be increased parent trust and improved teen decision-making when the time comes to lift restrictive measures.

5.3 Age and Gender Differences

This study confirms prior studies that suggest parents are more heavily involved in monitoring the social media use of younger teens in comparison to older teens (Douglas et al., 2020; Wallace, 2021). A reduction in monitoring as teens get older is developmentally appropriate. Parents can provide greater guidance and set firmer limits when their children are first learning to use the medium, ideally helping to establish healthy online behaviors and awareness of perils to avoid. As teen knowledge and parent trust both increase, parent oversight can recede.

Differences based on gender appear to be more complex. This study found differences on a single issue, specifically *who* their teen interacted with. The greater concern about daughters' interaction partners may reflect fear of sexual predators along with the stereotyped double

standard that suggests girls are more likely to be prey in this context. Such stereotypes have played out in other studies of teen online behaviors. For example, Douglas et al. (2020) found that parents of sons were more concerned than parents of daughters about teens watching sexually explicit material online.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides a glimpse at both baseline levels of parent and teen social media use and oversight and shifts in perceptions and oversight of teen social media use during a time of high stress, low school and social engagement, and overall uncertainty. The sample represents individuals who are social media users already and who opted in to participate, which is a limitation of the study. A survey of parents who are not social media users may have led to different findings. Such parents would not have experienced parallel increased reliance on social media alongside their teens as the pandemic began, nor would they be likely to consider themselves effective social media users at a similarly high rate. Continued research into this area would be valuable, examining how the triadic teen, parent, and social media relationship evolves more generally as teens age and within specific circumstances, such as among parents who have low rates of use.

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