The impact of social media platforms on communication within Saudi families: A quantitative analysis based on the theory of uses and gratifications

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of social media platforms (SMPs) on communication patterns within Saudi families. The research adopts an analytical description methodology employing a questionnaire tool administered to a sample of 384 male and female students from the University of Hail in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The statistical treatment utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-V26) and included methods such as frequencies, percentages, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and the chi-square test. Distinguished from prior studies, especially those employing quantitative indicators, this research embraces the theory of uses and gratifications to map communication between family members using SMPs. This approach allows for the determination of the prevalence of selective mutism within the family, considering the patriarchal family structure. The findings indicate that students generally communicate more with their mothers than with their fathers via SMPs. Additionally, male students exhibit higher levels of communication with their parents compared to female students, who tend to communicate more with their mothers than with their fathers. Moreover, the study reveals that the number of hours dedicated to using SMPs and family selective mutism did not display significant differences. Likewise, there were no significant variations between the age of SMP usage onset and family mutism. The study recommends conducting comparative analyses based on a similar approach to unveil communication dynamics in families with varying sociological, cultural, and geographical characteristics. Such research would enable the diagnosis of SMPs' impact on different family structures.

1. Introduction

The exponential growth and prevalence of Social Media Platforms (SMPs) have played a pivotal role in driving transformative changes within modern societies since the onset of the 21st century. These platforms have engendered profound shifts in various aspects of individuals' lifestyles, significantly shaping the way people interact, communicate, and conduct their daily activities (Cohen, 2022). SMPs enhanced the potential of communication between individuals and altered the function, areas, forms, and impacts of communication, reflecting the nature of social connections within the modern family (Spiteri Cornish, 2014). Suppose we observe that the Smartphone has replaced the laptop as the most widely used technology. In that case, we should understand that this is not because the Smartphone is an upgraded version of the laptop but rather because it has brought the individual closer and closer to the technology (Alruzayhi et al., 2018) or rather individualized or personalized communication technology (Shahzad et al., 2013).

When Social Media Platforms (SMPs) came into existence, they affected the family's social relationships and ability to carry out activities related to child-rearing, supervision, and assistance that require communicative behavior to ensure

positive actions in the community (Shumow and Lomax, 2002; Lawrence, 2021). This phenomenon has also had adverse effects on Saudi families. Notably, the increasing education and employment opportunities for Saudi women outside their homes have brought about significant changes in family dynamics and functions. In addition to this, the widespread adoption of social media sites represents another major transformation, impacting relationships within Saudi families and their ability to maintain effectiveness in the face of "Globalized Culture," which competes with their inherent "cultural construction."

Research exploring the utilization of SMPs among Saudi youth indicates a substantial surge in smartphone ownership, and some individuals have developed a dependence on these platforms (Alhassan et al., 2018; Alosaimi et al., 2016; Beyari, 2023).

The rising use of SMPs is not unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, despite the significant growth (in its indices) relative to other developed nations. Most research concurs that there is excessive use of SMPs, particularly among children and adolescents (Karimi et al., 2014; Kopecký et al., 2021; Leijse et al., 2023).

The development observed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the sphere of the Internet, particularly social communication platforms, has allowed the Kingdom to open up to many cultures and societies, particularly the youth. This tendency challenges the Saudi family due to the traditional and conservative nature of the culture that permeates sectors of Saudi society.

The significance of the research lies in the fact that the population of the study (Hail province in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) carries the duality mentioned above, as all segments of the society, especially students (Genedy, 2021), quickly adapted to modern communication technology on the one hand, and the spread of Bedouin traditional culture, in which conservative religious ideology occupies the central position on the other. Consequently, gender segregation is still an established regulation in the various phases of education. Family and tribal affiliation are still powerful factors in forming social interactions and producing stakes in the local community. In addition, Christian culture remains a primary organizing principle for daily life. The questions we pose in this paper are:

1. What are the effects of SMPs on students' relationships with their families?
2. Did using SMPs reduce the functions of the Saudi family and weaken its connections? Or it contributed to strengthening and maintaining it?

1.1. Research problem

The advent of the internet was accompanied by qualitative changes to the many types of social relationships (job, production, upbringing, education, friendships, kinships, and family relations). Numerous researchers concurred that the advent of SMPs directly weakened social bonds and steadily increased the importance of the individual at the price of society, social life, family life, and social institutions (Lopez and Cuarteros, 2020).

If individualism is one of the tenets of modernity, then rapid industrialization and the proliferation of SMPs have transformed 'individualism' into a narcissistic inclination, as evidenced by Exhibitionists, Self-Presentation, Managing Impressions (Ellison et al., 2006), Selfies, and Self-Extension (Belk, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the SMPs provided limitless communication, expression, and entertainment opportunities. Still, it weakened the authority of social control and monitoring of social institutions, especially the family, thereby affecting the formation of identities and giving rise to the term "Fluid Identities." In addition, pathological phenomena related to the excessive use of the Internet and social media platforms (SMPs) have emerged, which have a bearing on the quality of family interactions, such as Internet Addiction, Feelings of Loneliness, and Familial Selective Mutism.

Familial selective mutism is an indicator, along with Depression (Al-Hantoushi and Al-Abdullateef, 2014; Saputri and Yumarni, 2023; Griffith et al., 2023) and Internet Addiction (Saquib, 2020), for the weakness of relationships between family members as a result of their use of SMPs. It is reflected in the fact that one family member has no interest in communicating with certain family members in certain situations.

The studies revealed that selective mutism is not caused by a lack of knowledge, perception, ability to communicate and talk, physical disability, autism, or a communication disorder (Melfsen et al., 2022). It is by excessive internet use or shyness or depressed mood, or reclusive behavior (Dow et al., 1995; Cunningham et al., 2006) or the nature of family relations (Melfsen et al., 2022), or socialization (Ford et al., 1998).

Despite the various causes, mutism is characterized as a reluctance and unwillingness to communicate with specific individuals in certain social situations in which communication is delayed. In contrast, the individual speaks and interacts in other contexts. Mutism is also defined as reluctance and unwillingness to talk with some family members in specific social contexts.

The studies that examined the relationships of youth with the internet concurred that there is excessive use of SMPs. Still, they differed regarding the effects of the uses on the relationships within the family (Procentese et al., 2019) and its relation to the absence of communication within the family and the areas of uses. The SMPs are prevalent in diverse countries, distinguished by their culture, values, and social systems (Al Omoush et al., 2012; Griffith et al., 2023; Alshare et al., 2023). SMPs are utilized differently not only by societies but also by individuals within those communities. As a result, the excessive use of SMPs has varying repercussions

at the level of familial selective mutism. This is because a society's culture affects the uses and gratifications based on its network of values, standards, symbols, and weight of the family, which limit the severity of these repercussions (Leijse et al., 2023; Saputri and Yumarni, 2023).

The studies that hypothesized a relationship between excessive Internet use, particularly by SMPs, and addiction, social isolation, or familial mutism, relied on causal interpretation and quantitative indicators for Internet use by individuals (Alruzayhi et al., 2018; Saquib, 2020; Alosaimi et al., 2016), which are expressed in the number of daily hours allocated. It serves as evidence to demonstrate the connection. The uses, motives, and expected gratifications were not analyzed qualitatively to determine the degree of exacerbation of the "familial selective mutism" phenomenon. Or it was to determine whether the uses themselves may be a means to reduce the phenomenon of mutism within the family and to enhance communication among its members (Procentese et al., 2019; Doty and Dworkin, 2014; Hessel and LeBouef, 2023).

In this study, we will not adopt the liberal concept of the relationship between the Internet and individuals, which states that the Internet is a market full of consumer goods. A rational consumer chooses from this market the stuff that can fulfill his needs (Windahl et al., 2008), even though it leads him to adopt satisfying behaviors at the expense of his psychological and social health, as well as at the expense of his culture and family. Instead, we hypothesize that SMPs use is governed by limited rationality (Carpentiere and Petralia, 2023). By that, we mean that the uses of SMPs by the students do not interpret their narrow personal motives which may lead them to selective mutism. Still, they specify the values and standards of cultural patterns they belong to and refer to when identifying and evaluating their uses (Brocke et al., 2009; Ajina, 2019; Karimi et al., 2014; Griffith et al., 2023; Alshare et al., 2023).

The earliest studies (Rosenstein and Grant, 1997) overlooked this critical approach for the use of SMPs by the public since they focused on the use of SMPs by individuals, their individual opinions and selections, which the theory assumes are conscious and free (Ruggiero, 2000). However, the aforementioned is the theoretical position followed by this study.

The inclusion of variable of cultural pattern in the interpretation of behaviors and, in our case, the motivations of the students to use SMPs and their gratifications necessitates the approval of the position of the family in these uses, as the family represents a standard pattern, monitoring system, controlling, and a reference for social affiliation, all of which contribute to a degree to defining the phenomenon of familial selective mutism. Regardless of their position, it is impossible to understand students' behaviors without referring to their selves as if they were disconnected from the social system

and cultural pattern they belong to Astleitner et al. (2023). Additionally, familial selective mutism cannot be diagnosed without an investigation of uses and gratifications and the presence of the family. Therefore, the indicator of many hours spent communicating with family members, which may be correlated with the degree of familial selective mutism, does not disclose any correlation between the young and their parents. This is impacted by selective mutism and selective mutism severity (if found).

Therefore, the diagnosis and evaluation of the phenomena of family selective mutism must be based on analyzing uses and expected gratifications for adolescents and not on quantifying time spent surfing the internet and using SMPs. Therefore, users are faced with two motivations: To be independent of the family and to belong to it and communicate with its members (Tariq et al., 2022). In reality, it falls under the influence of traditional and cultural values on the one hand and rapid modernization accelerated by communication technology on the other.

The youth attempt to strike a balance between his sense of independence and his relationship with the family, which operates as a social institution that provides life functions (education, shelter, food, and wealth) and reproduces social systems and cultural values (kinship, religion, belonging). In the oscillation between the individual, self, and personal on the one hand and the familial, institutional, and cultural on the other, "familial selective mutism" is explained as a phenomenon that is not caused by the excessive use of SMPs, but instead reflects the duality that the Saudi student experiences.

1.2. Research objectives

This study aims to determine the association between the uses and gratifications of SMPs for students and the prevalence of selective mutism within Saudi families. To reach this target, the following objectives must be attained:

- To determine the type of student usage of SMPs.
- To determine the level of family influence on student use of SMPs.
- To determine the extent to which the family influences students' use of SMPs and their satisfaction.
- To determine the extent to which the use of SMPs affects the frequency of communication between students and their parents.

2. Methodology and statistical treatment

This study employed a descriptive statistical analysis to investigate the usage of social communication sites and satisfaction levels among students of the College of Literature and Arts at the University of Hail. The data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed to a sample of 384 students, consisting of both male (73.2%) and female

(26.8%) participants, during the first three months of 2022.

The questionnaire encompassed four distinct components. The first part aimed to gather information about the general characteristics of the students and their families. The second part sought to understand the students' motivations, usage patterns of social communication sites, and the satisfaction derived from their usage. The third segment focused on assessing the influence of the students' families on their motivations and engagement with social communication sites. Finally, the fourth part was designed to explore the consequences and gratifications arising from students' use of social media in their family relationships.

The study population comprised male and female students from the College of Literature and Arts at the University of Hail, totaling 9,788 students. The sample size of 384 students was selected from this population through randomization, representing approximately 25 percent of the sampling frame, which is an acceptable percentage for descriptive research. The researchers used "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-V26)" for statistical analysis, employing various techniques such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and the chi-square test.

Regarding family characteristics in the study sample, it was observed that the families exhibited conventional traits in terms of structure, with features such as polygamy, a large number of children, and low educational levels. Moreover, the distribution of labor within the families showed gender-based segregation of duties, with women's work being comparatively weaker, and their educational levels relatively lower. These factors were found to influence how students utilized SMPs and affected the patterns of family communication.

A significant proportion of student respondents (66.1%) belonged to families with average monthly incomes between 5,000 and less than 10,000 Saudi Riyals, while 28.1% came from families with incomes ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 Saudi Riyals. Only 5.7% of respondents reported a monthly family income exceeding 20,000 Saudi Riyals.

The low economic capital of respondent families, as indicated by their monthly income, could be attributed to two primary factors. First, a small percentage of fathers and mothers (3.9% and 2.3% respectively) possessed advanced degrees compared to a higher rate of literacy (10.7% and 21.4% respectively). Additionally, cultural factors played a significant role, reflecting social and religious traditions that continue to impact segments of Saudi society, leading to reservations about women's education and employment based on conservative religious values. Consequently, a substantial majority of respondents' mothers (73.2%) did not work, while 52.8% of fathers were retired, and 43.5% were employed. Traditional culture also influenced family structure, with approximately 32.3% of respondents' fathers having more than one wife.

Family size was also found to be relatively large among the respondents, reflecting the prevalence of extended families in traditionally conservative societies. Specifically, 35.4% of respondents had four to six siblings, 29.2% had seven to nine siblings, and 22.9% had more than nine siblings.

3. Results

This research investigates the utilization patterns and ramifications of SMPs within the student population at the College of Literature and Arts, University of Hail. The findings shed light on the age of initial SMP usage among students and the diverse motivations driving their engagement, encompassing recreational purposes, information-seeking behaviors, and social networking activities. Additionally, the study delves into the influence of the family in shaping the students' adoption of SMPs and their preferred communication channels. Furthermore, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the implications arising from excessive SMP usage, addressing potential negative effects in considerable depth.

3.1. Possibilities and uses

The examination of data in this study reveals that students enrolled in the College of Literature and Arts at the University of Hail commenced their engagement with SMPs at an early stage of their lives. Evidently, approximately half of the study's population, represented by the sample under consideration, initiated their use of the Internet between the ages of 10 and 15, while an intriguing 29% adopted this technology before reaching the age of 10.

An analysis of the survey findings, presented in Table 1, provides valuable insights into the internet infrastructure and device ownership among the respondents and their families. Specifically, it is deduced that a considerable proportion of the respondents' families, accounting for 77.1%, possess access to WiFi within their households. This observation also suggests that a substantial majority of respondents, amounting to 72.4%, hail from urban localities within the Hail region, while the remaining 27.6% reside in rural areas.

Moreover, the prevalence of smartphone ownership among Saudi Arabian students emerges as a noteworthy trend. As evidenced by the research sample, 33.1% of the respondents possess multiple smartphones, while a significant 30.7% have multiple SIM cards. This reflects the widespread utilization and reliance on smartphones as a primary means of accessing SMPs.

Additionally, financial patterns concerning internet usage are discernible among the participants. A notable 44.8% of the respondents reported monthly expenditures ranging from 100 to 200 Saudi Riyals (SR) on the internet. Furthermore, 26.9% indicated lower expenses, allocating less than

100 SR, while 28.4% reported expenditures below 200 SR.

These findings collectively provide a comprehensive portrait of the students' early adoption of SMPs, the prevalence of internet access within households, the dominance of smartphone ownership, and the financial aspects pertaining to internet usage among the surveyed population.

Table 1: Age of the beginning of using SMPs

	Frequency	%
Less than 5 years	33	8.6
From 5 to less than 10	78	20.3
From 10 to less than 15	176	45.8
From 15 to less than 20	94	24.5
20 years and over	3	.8
Total	384	100.0

3.2. Platforms and uses

As per the latest data provided by CITC (2021), WhatsApp holds the distinction of being the most prevalent social networking site in Saudi Arabia, boasting a remarkable usage rate of 89.9%. Following closely behind is Snapchat, which garners a usage rate of 64.9%.

However, when examining the specific research sample under consideration, the dynamics appear to differ. Surprisingly, Snapchat emerges as the most favored social networking site among the participants, commanding a substantial usage rate of 75.5%. Twitter secures the second position with a notable prevalence of 43.6%, while YouTube and TikTok share a close percentage of 41.7%. Instagram also commands a usage rate of 41.7%.

Intriguingly, both Facebook and WhatsApp find themselves in the sixth position, with an equal usage rate of 1.8%. This fact merits further exploration and consideration in the context of the research findings.

On the contrary, the data uncovered a substantial presence of students across multiple SMPs, with 60.4% maintaining between one and three accounts, and 28.6% possessing four to six accounts. Remarkably, the time dedicated to SMPs varies significantly, yet it is particularly striking that a considerable proportion of students expend a substantial amount of time on social networking sites. Specifically, 50.5% of the respondents disclosed spending a minimum of 5 hours daily on SMPs, while 31.5% reported allocating 3 to 5 hours each day to these platforms. These findings corroborate previous research highlighting the extensive utilization of social networking sites by Saudi students (Alhassan et al., 2018; Abdel-Salam et al., 2019; Al-Hantoushi and Al-Abdullateef, 2014).

3.3. Pursuit of entertainment

As per the students' responses, the primary reason for utilizing SMPs is for leisure and entertainment, as indicated by the highest preference rate of 60.1% for watching movies and videos, followed by 38.7% for sports viewing, and 25.2% for sharing photos and videos. The secondary purpose is information seeking, with a preference rate of 46.0%. Notably, seeking friendships and romantic relationships had a relatively low rate of 9.2%. Table 2.

Table 2: Motives for using SMPs

	Frequency	%
Watch movies and videos	231	60.1
Watching sports	148	38.7
Post photos and videos	97	25.2
Study and research	177	46
Find new friendships	35	9.2
commerce	52	13.5
Community participation	148	38.7

According to the rates of students' penetration of the specialized websites of SMPs, the expected gratifications of students rank in the order of their motivations. The preference rate for entertainment websites was 73%. For sports websites, it was 35.6%; for religious websites, it was 40.5%; for scientific websites, it was 36.3%. Regarding online dating websites, just 9.2% of students responded.

The majority of the students' responses indicate a preference for "negative" interactions, as reflected in the prevalent trend toward such behavior in the following chart.

Table 3 clearly illustrates that the most prevalent behavior among students is passive viewing of content, with a rate of 68.75%. Conversely, the act of presenting oneself in daily life on SMPs is expected to have a much lower rate of 21.5%, as is the case with sharing videos (22.7%), leaving comments (24.5%), and using emojis (29.4%) Table 3.

Table 3: Forms of interaction in uses of SMPs

	Frequency	%
Publish information and pictures about yourself	82	21.5
	87	22.7
Sharing pictures and videos of others	264	68.7
To be content with watching only	113	29.4
Emoji		
Writing comments	94	24.5

3.4. Impact of family on the uses of students

The personal choices of students regarding the use of SMPs are not only determined by their individual preferences but also by the influence and status of their family. Table 4 depicts the position of the family concerning other areas of affiliation.

The study concluded that students' early usage of social communication platforms and the number of hours they spent was not detrimental to their family relationships. In reality, the family occupies a significant social and emotional position among students, reflecting the program's efficiency. Regarding the feeling of belonging, it ranks first with a relative weight of 0.92 percent, followed by friendships with a relative importance of 0.71 percent, and the tribe with a relative weight of 0.61 percent (Table 4).

Table 4: Rank of spheres of belonging

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	Rank
Tribe	Frequency	62	72	140	49	61	3.07	3
	%	16.1	18.8	36.5	12.8	15.9	0.61	
Family	Frequency	277	78	7	19	3	4.58	1
	%	72.1	20.3	1.8	4.9	.8	0.92	
Friends	Frequency	27	196	132	16	13	3.54	2
	%	7.0	51.0	34.4	4.2	3.4	0.71	
Sports team	Frequency	6	26	87	230	35	2.32	4
	%	1.6	6.8	22.7	59.9	9.1	0.46	
Saudi society	Frequency	12	12	18	70	272	1.49	5
	%	3.1	3.1	4.7	18.2	70.8	0.30	

The study does not interpret the significant influence of the family among students solely based on emotional attachment. The responses suggest that the family plays a crucial role in fulfilling traditional functions, especially concerning wealth and resources, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Arrangement of wealth resources as per values

	Scholarship	Parents	Brothers and sisters	Work/Business	Relatives
Frequency	4.58	3.72	2.75	2.46	1.5
%	0.92	0.74	0.55	0.49	0.3
Rank	1	2	3	4	5

The results of the study unveil that parents play a pivotal role as the second most substantial source of financial support, carrying a relative weight of 0.74. Their contribution is of utmost importance, as they offer essential assistance and monetary aid to students who benefit from scholarships. However, it is noteworthy that parents are not the sole providers of financial support, as siblings also play a significant role with a relative weight of 0.55. Intriguingly, when considering the combined relative weights of parents and siblings, the family unit emerges as the predominant source of financial support, surpassing the influence of scholarships in this context (Table 5).

3.5. Family's position in the uses of SMPs by students

The salience of the family unit among students becomes apparent in the communication channels they uphold with their family members via SMPs.

As demonstrated in Table 6, there exists a notable presence of parents within the students' social groups, with mothers exhibiting a higher representation percentage of 49.1% as compared to fathers with 41.1%. Furthermore, the respondent's roster of friends displays a greater proportion of brothers, amounting to 68.1%, in contrast to sisters, which accounts for 59.5% (Table 6).

Table 6: Percentage of the presence of family members in the friends' groups on social communication websites

	Frequency	%
Father	158	41.1
Mother	188	49.1
Brother	261	68.1
Sister	229	59.5
Not Found	66	17.2

The significance of the family in shaping students' usage of SMPs is underscored by compelling evidence, revealing that a substantial majority of groups formed on SMPs are family-oriented, with a noteworthy preference rate of 42.3%. This preference surpasses that of leisure groups (36.8%), sports groups (25.2%), and religious groups (20.2%).

Evidently, students express a clear inclination to employ these platforms as a means to disseminate information, particularly in the form of pictures and videos, among their family members, irrespective of the specific channel employed for parental-child communication. The research results vividly illustrate the extensive nature of this practice, as it is evident that mothers are more actively engaged in such exchanges with their children (students) compared to fathers, with percentages of 38% and 23.3%, respectively. Moreover, the frequency of exchanges between students and their siblings exceeds that with their parents. This holds true for other relatives as well, as evidenced by a substantial preference percentage of 41.7%.

These findings collectively highlight the salience of family interactions in driving students' engagement with SMPs, emphasizing the pivotal role of such platforms as channels for sharing information within the familial context.

3.6. Effect of uses on the family relationships

The present study seeks to assess the influence of the internet on familial communication by employing two prevalent indicators: the duration of internet usage and the age of initiation into internet usage. As evident from the data presented in Table 7, an examination of the responses provided by the sample members concerning the manifestations of selective mutism in family dynamics, based on the variable of the number of hours spent by students using SMPs, reveals that no statistically significant differences are observed. This conclusion is substantiated by the calculated F-value of 2.009, which does not achieve statistical significance, as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7: One-way analysis of variance for differences in the responses of sample members about the manifestations of selective mutism in the family life for the variable of the number of hours spent daily on the uses of SMPs

	Sums of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	1143.502	3	381.167	2.009	.112
Within groups	72107.123	380	189.756		
Total	73250.625	383			

In addition, the study indicated that the age at which SMPs were first used, which is regarded as an early age, is not among the causes of family selective mutism. As the value of F reaches .880, which is not statistically significant, there are no statistically significant variations between the responses of sample members regarding the manifestations of selective mutism in the family life according to the variable of the age of beginning to use SMPs (Table 8).

Table 8: One-way analysis of variance for differences in the responses of sample members about the manifestations of selective mutism in the family life for variables related to the age at which the uses of SMPs started

	Sums of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	674.156	4	168.539	.880	.476
Within groups	72576.469	379	191.495		
Total	73250.625	383			

There are no statistically significant variations between male and female pupils regarding their communicative relationship with their father, indicating that the gender variable has a bearing on identifying the communication trends between parents and children. In contrast, the results revealed statistically significant gender disparities in the communicative interaction between male and female students and their mothers in favor of male students, as indicated in the following Table 9.

Table 9: Communication with father and mother using SMPs

Communication with the mother using SMPs		Male	Female	Total	Communication with the father using SMPs		Male	Female	Total
I start	Frequency	47	9	56	I start	Frequency	64	20	84
	%	12.2%	2.3%	14.6%		%	16.7%	5.2%	21.9%
Little	Frequency	81	20	101	Little	Frequency	91	29	120
	%	21.1%	5.2%	26.3%		%	23.7%	7.6%	31.3%
Average	Frequency	111	49	160	Average	Frequency	83	33	116
	%	28.9%	12.8%	41.7%		%	21.6%	8.6%	30.2%
Much	Frequency	33	21	54	Much	Frequency	34	13	47
	%	8.6%	5.5%	14.1%		%	8.9%	3.4%	12.2%
Very much	Frequency	9	4	13	Very much	Frequency	9	8	17
	%	2.3%	1.0%	3.4%		%	2.3%	2.1%	4.4%
Total	Frequency	281	103	384	Total	Frequency	281	103	384
	%	73.2%	26.8%	100.0%		%	73.2%	26.8%	100.0%
Significant differences at 0.05	Chi-Square	df	Sign	No significant differences	Chi-Square	Df	Sign
	11.12	4	.025			4.53	4	.338

The statistical analysis in Table 9 indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the genders (male and female) at the significance level of 0.05 regarding the use of SMPs to communicate with the father, as the value of Chi-Square reached $x^2 = 4.53$, which is not statistically significant. In addition, the statistical analysis in Table 9 indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the genders (male and female) at the significance level of 0.05 in terms of communication with the mother using SMPs, as the Chi-Square value reached $x^2 = 11.12$, which is statistically significant (Table 9).

4. Outcomes and discussions

This study aimed to investigate the presence of "selective mutism" within Saudi families by examining the usage patterns of SMPs among students in the Hail region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The choice of this location was strategic, as it allowed exploration of the hypothesis that students' utilization of SMPs is influenced by their cultural background. Hence, cultural characteristics, particularly those rooted in traditional family structures and functions, exert an impact on students' engagement with SMPs. The study sought to ascertain whether excessive SMP usage inevitably leads to selective mutism within the family context.

Given the conservative, traditional, and deeply ingrained cultural environment prevalent in the Hail region, juxtaposed with the increasing integration of modern communication technologies, it served as an apt research population for examining the interplay and mutual influence between contemporary and traditional cultures. This was achieved by analyzing the students' SMP usage patterns, gratifications derived from their usage, the family's role, and its overall impact on the phenomenon.

The results concerning the nature of students' SMP usage indicated that their patterns align with the general trends observed in numerous countries regarding internet usage and engagement with SMPs, characteristic of the so-called "Generation Z" or "Internet Generation."

Furthermore, the research revealed that over two-thirds of respondents have Wi-Fi access in their homes, and a significant portion of students allocate additional funds for internet subscriptions on their smartphones (with some employing multiple SIM cards, accounting for 30.7% of students).

More than sixty percent of students have at least three accounts, and almost one-third of respondents have more than three. The percentage of internet penetration has increased, as demonstrated by the findings of the present study and confirmed by other studies conducted on Saudi youth (Saquib, 2020; Alruzayhi et al., 2018; Alobaid et al., 2018) or in other parts of the world (Vaidya et al., 2016; Kopecký et al., 2021).

Also, the research found that students received Smartphones and the chance for internet penetration and SMPs at a relatively young age (Alobaid et al., 2018), as one-third of them began using them before age 10 and the other half after the age of 10. Internet penetration at a young age, that is, since childhood, creates a consequence supported by a study comparing five Arab nations. This survey was done in 2013, and its findings represented the varied uses of mobile phones and the Internet by youngsters aged eight to ten. In addition, a United Nations Children's Fund research comparing European nations validated the result (UNICEF, 2019).

The excessive and improper use of SMPs is among the fundamental findings about family mutism uncovered by the research of Savci et al. (2022). For Saudi youth entertainment and communication. Previous research conducted on Saudi youth has documented an increase in the number of hours spent on Internet use and its prevalence (Alosaimi, et al., 2016; El Azab et al., 2017; Alruzayhi et al., 2018).

The study that evaluated the youth's use of SMPs determined that they do so for four reasons: Filling free time, obtaining information, finding enjoyment, and searching for friends (Cortese and Rubin, 2010). Consistent with the conclusion, examining the respondents' motivations showed that amusement is the first anticipated reward from students (Park and Lee, 2014; Beyari, 2023). However, the study of Jung et al. (2007), considered that building friendships and keeping them is the first purpose behind the use of Facebook by students. This survey revealed that University of Hail students had a low propensity for online dating and that establishing friendships is less relevant to them. The kids enjoy the "negative interaction" that occurs when using the SMPs and retaining positive relationships (Table 3). In their examination of women's Facebook usage; Boyd and Ellison (2007) reached this conclusion.

The pursuit of social capital and the creation of independent worlds through investment in diversifying and expanding friendships are not among the respondents' anticipated gratifications. Therefore, social connection and communication with others outside of restricted circles (the nuclear family and the extended family) are not essential for students.

The conservative tendency is reflected in the responses of the participants answers to the question, "How do they justify this order of social communication platforms for their uses?" The primary argument (frequency with a rate of 84,4%) for their selection of other communication platforms is that the general population in the Kingdom utilizes these platforms more frequently than others. The kids' use of Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok is driven by the need to be associated with the subscriber through simulation, which facilitates communication and interaction with others.

It appears that "social media culture" encompasses the prevalent use of social media platforms, their representations and information, and attitudes toward them. These are the factors that determine how social segments utilize social media sites. It is a culture that emphasizes the necessity of including everyone in the group. The affirmation by respondents that they use Snapchat because other people use it results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e., the students accept it because other students accept it.

In contrast to the situation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whether among students (the population of the study) or the general population of Saudis (according to the CITC (2021)), numerous studies have shown that Facebook is more popular than other platforms in many countries around the world (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). This demonstrates that using SMPs to fulfill the demand for belonging through the stimulation of others is a significant element in determining the supremacy of this platform over other platforms in any country. Additionally, research demonstrates that students perceive group membership as one of their desired rewards.

Students' use of SMPs and their gratifications are influenced by their social and cultural traits, as determined by the second purpose of the study, which was to assess the influence of family on the students' use of SMPs (Al Omoush et al., 2012). The research found that students are affected by SMPs in terms of their relationships, values, and standards of traditional family culture, which plays a crucial role in molding the uses and defining the gratifications (Karimi et al., 2014; Leijse et al., 2023; Saputri and Yumarni, 2023; Hessel and LeBouef, 2023). In the same context, it is posited that students' motivations for using Facebook exhibit variation based on their cultural backgrounds. The families of these students continue to fulfill social functions (such as socialization and social affiliation), economic functions (providing housing and support), and anthropological functions (related to kinship and relationships resulting from intermarriages between families). Religious culture confers "sanctification" upon the family and its kinship ties. All these factors contribute to family cohesion, bestowing it with significance and safeguarding it against communication breakdown between children and

their parents, thereby mitigating the occurrence of "familial selective mutism."

The value attributed to family cohesion, as evidenced by respondents' answers, underscores the importance of the family within a culture of conservatism. When asked about the significance of adhering to customs and traditions, 54.2% of students deemed it "very much necessary," while 26.8% considered it "necessary." Only 7.7% expressed negative views regarding adherence to customs and traditions.

Religion and customs and traditions appear interconnected, with 80.7% of students performing prayers permanently, 16.9% doing so occasionally, and 2.3% not performing prayers. This linkage strengthens the traditional culture, imparting religious value to the family and establishing it as a vital resource in the lives of students, serving as their primary sphere of belonging.

The emotional capital of the family among students is evident in their interactions on SMPs. The family ranks second, with a relative weight of 0.89%, as a topic that provokes reactions and engagement from students, surpassed only by the Islamic religion and preceding the tribe, favorite sports teams, and Saudi society. Despite a relatively low frequency of interaction, the family's influence is a potent motivator for engagement.

Families develop within the context of the dominant culture, making them institutions for perpetuating that culture. In the selection of a spouse, family kinship carries the most significant influence (51.8%), followed by tribal kinship (47.9%). Mothers play a primary role in marriage matters, acting as a bridge between families, surpassing fathers by a relative weight of 44.5% to 6%.

Despite the omnipresence of SMPs in students' daily lives and the hours they spend using them, students still turn to their families for information and seek advice and opinions on various matters, including religious (62.6%), academic (62.6%), health-related (52.1%), and purchasing decisions (50.3%). The students prioritize seeking information from their mothers (relative weight estimated at 55.2%), followed by their fathers (47.2%), brothers (44.8%), and sisters (43.6%).

Regarding the study's third objective, the results indicate that excessive SMP usage may have negative consequences. Contrary to a form of "selective mutism" or estrangement between children and parents, SMP usage may, in fact, enhance or at least maintain actual communication levels between them. This finding is consistent with numerous international studies that have highlighted the role of SMPs in fostering and sustaining parent-child connections (Ball et al., 2013; Child et al., 2015; Hessel and LeBouef, 2023) because they enable parallel communication with direct communication and integrate with it.

The responses from students indicate that the relationship with parents is not only enriched by communication through various social media platforms, but the percentage of students whose father or mother is on their friends' list on social networks is relatively high. It is when it is compared to the findings of other studies that examined communication between parents and youth via SMPs (Wang et al., 2015; Ramsey et al., 2013; Mullen and Hamilton, 2016).

The presence of family members with different percentages, as it reached more than half for brothers and slightly less than half for parents in the list of students' friends on SMPs (Table 6), may strengthen the relationships between them (Kanter et al., 2012) if those relationships were good beforehand (Child and Westermann, 2013) and the context of communication and its circumstances were also good so that the students and their families can use SMPs to communicate with each other.

Additionally, the results indicate that 78% of respondents utilize social networking sites to communicate with their fathers, while 85.4% do so with their moms, according to the findings of this study. This conclusion is comparable to the results of Ball et al. (2013) (81.5%) and Child et al. (2015) (93.6%), which are high percentages compared to the findings of Padilla-Walker et al. (2012), which found that 40 percent of youngsters use SMPs to interact with their parents. In a similar approach, Child and Westermann (2013) concluded that such ratios indicate that the relationships between family members are already promising. The conclusion is verified by this research also as the percentages of students' membership to the family groups on SMPs is more significant than their belonging to the other groups of various peculiarity.

If the more significant number of student responses relates to an average percentage of communication with the father and mother, then this average percentage favors moms (41.7% vs. 30.2%) more than fathers (Table 9). This trend favors the father when students refrain from communicating with their parents via social media. So, 21.9% of kids did not use SMPs for communication with their parents, compared to 14.6% who did not use SMPs for communication with their mothers. The nature of a traditional family with a patriarchal structure and the mother's availability in the house interprets this trend towards communication with the mother more than the father.

Regarding determining the effect of students' use of SMPs by adopting the variable of the number of hours of use and the age at which they began using the Internet and SMPs, the study's results (Table 7) indicated that the number of hours students spent using SMPs did not affect the desire to communicate or have a conversation with family members, particularly children, and parents. There were no statistically significant variations between respondents' statements about 'familial selective mutism' and the number of hours they spent using SMPs. This result is consistent with the conclusion of Ling and Li (2019) that there is no significant

association between children's excessive use of SMPs and their family's communicative ties.

However, these results differ from previous studies that were conducted on the relationship between SMPs and the Saudi family. It concluded that there is a negative effect of SMPs on communication and conversation between family members and established a correlation between the number of hours allocated daily for SMP use (Alhassan et al., 2018; Alosaimi et al., 2016; Aljehani 2019; Alobaid et al., 2018).

The research that examined the usage of SMPs in family interactions could not reach a single conclusion about their danger or utility (Tariq et al., 2022). This study indicated that the amount of time youth spend using SMPs has no effect on selective mutism manifestations within the family.

Even though all students began utilizing SMPs at different ages during childhood, this does not influence the interpretation of selective mutism within the family. According to the analysis of the results (Table 8), there were no statistically significant variations between the responses received from respondents regarding the symptoms of "selective mutism" in family life based on the variable of the age at which SMPs were first employed. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies, which found that children's early Internet use is not a factor in interpreting poor or interrupted communication between children and parents (Wang et al., 2015; Lopez and Cuarteros, 2020).

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of SMPs usage on the expression of "selective mutism" by analyzing the communication patterns within respondents' families concerning the utilization of SMPs. As a result, the study aimed to ascertain that family communication and interactions are subject to variations influenced predominantly by pre-existing family connections rather than being significantly affected by the presence of SMPs.

The data indicate an increase in the proportion of persons who speak with their moms, with the average communication degree reaching 28.9% among boys compared to 12.9% among girls. This can be due to the gender-based division of roles and opportunities within the family, which forces female students to remain at home after school hours (Saquib, 2020) in contrast to male students who enjoy greater freedom of movement and possess the means for this movement (Driving License and Vehicle). In addition, kids are permitted to be outside for a limited time, during which they must communicate with their mothers for information, supervision, and guidance.

The results demonstrated that the mother is the axis of communication within the family for both sons and daughters, as they communicate with their mothers via SMPs more frequently than with their fathers. Additionally, male students interact with their parents more frequently than female classmates. This phenomenon is due to the patriarchal, traditional Arab family structure to which the families of the respondents belong (as evidenced by the characteristics of the families in the research sample), the presence of the mother in the house despite the weak functions of the mothers of the respondents, and the gender-based division of roles. In this arrangement, communication with the mother is more than with the father, and communication with brothers and sisters is more excellent than communication with the mother.

The predicted gratifications of respondents' use of SMPs appear to be the maintenance of existing relationships rather than the establishment of new ones. They are compelled to communicate within the context of their current social ties. Chen (2019) also discovered the need to preserve contact with the family through SMPs, based on the necessity of communication within the context of their existing social relationships.

Several studiessimilar to this one have indicated that the usage of SMPs has no negative impact on communication within the family, notably between children and parents (Lopez and Cuarteros, 2020; Kanter et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2015). Instead, the research indicates that these platforms deepen the bond between them or at least serve as a communication bridge in situations where direct communication is difficult.

Similarly, the study concluded that the students' use of SMPs was intended to maintain family ties, as evidenced in the respondents' families based on the structure of the distribution of relationships within the traditional family, as these families have no desire or intention to eliminate relationships. The family is still functional in carrying out essential functions such as belonging, providing, caring, solidarity, and procreating kinship.

These conclusions present a departure from prior studies conducted on youth and children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which posited a "zero-sum game" scenario in the relationship between SMPs and family connections. These earlier studies suggested that SMPs weaken family bonds and contribute to the emergence of selective mutism within the family. To validate the generalizability of our findings, further investigation is required in other regions of the Kingdom, especially in major urban centers such as Riyadh and Jeddah. This necessitates the incorporation of multiple sociological variables that were not explicitly considered in the present study.

5. Recommendations

The study advocates for a comprehensive consideration of cultural, historical, and social factors when interpreting and analyzing the impacts of uses and gratifications associated with SMPs on family relationships, particularly with regard to communication patterns within the family. To achieve this, it is imperative to conduct comparative research both within different regions of the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and between the Kingdom and other nations.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that excessive use of SMPs does not necessarily lead to "selective mutism" within families. The research aims to corroborate this discovery through further investigations. Additionally, the study seeks to conduct analyses that challenge the hypotheses presented in previous studies, exploring the possibility that adopting SMPs may result in contrasting consequences. Specifically, the investigation delves into the theory that families' experiences of "mutism," sadness, and social anxiety disorder may contribute to excessive reliance on SMPs. To address these aspects, the study advocates for a systematic approach to examining how families engage with SMPs.

While existing research has primarily focused on "selective mutism" as a psychological condition among school-aged children, the study emphasizes the significance of investigating this phenomenon within the family context, spanning across different age groups, including children, adolescents, and the elderly. This exploration of "familial selective mutism" becomes particularly crucial given the transformations that families undergo in diverse civilizations due to scientific and technological advancements. Hence, the study recommends in-depth research to shed light on this aspect of family dynamics and its implications in the context of contemporary societal changes.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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