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## The Dangers of Free Speech in the Modern World

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The Dangers of Free Speech in the Modern World

Katie Yoak

School of Communication

**Honors Research Project**

Submitted to

*The Honors College*



## Introduction

The art of communication is something that has existed in a constant state of flux. Languages have developed, evolved, been modified, replaced, and even died as people have found new and different ways to translate messages. Along with this change in verbal communication written communication has evolved as well. Changing throughout history from scratched out pictures in cave walls, to hieroglyphs, from scrawling on stone tablets to calligraphy on envelopes. As these different forms of communication have evolved over time, how we interact with one another and communicate has drastically changed as well.

In the late 1960s the internet was created for governmental use. The 1980s saw the growth of the internet as more computers joined up and the world wide web was introduced in 1991. In 1992 the “web” was issued for commercial use (History.com, 2010). 1997 and 2002 were the years that some of the earliest forms of social media came about and suddenly people had a whole new medium with which to communicate (Jones, 2015). In 2007 the world was turned upside down once more by the iPhone, released by Apple. Suddenly not only could you make calls and text on your phone, but new services were added and are still being added to this day (History.com, 2012). One of the features you could have on your smart phone is social networking sites which under 70% of Americans and over 2.6 billion people worldwide engage in today (Jones,2015).

With these ever-changing mediums for communication the act of communication itself has remained in a state of flux, and thus, our understanding and studies of communication must be just as quick to evolve. This need to evolve our understanding of how the act of communication has evolved is especially emphasized as each new variation of communication grows to exist in a different format. Phone calls removed the usage of visually received

non-verbals in communication and people now are communicating only with their voices. Texting took out all the elements of communication except for the words themselves. The invention of emojis added an element of non-verbal communication and a new format of unofficial grammar has evolved to convey a new meaning. Nowadays many social media sites have their own unofficial rules amongst their users of how to interact, engage, and communicate with one another. This new media and how people communicate through it would be shown to be incredibly useful during the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020.

When the Coronavirus Pandemic took the world by storm in early 2020 nothing would be quite the same. Lives were altered, for many in a rather permanent way. Suddenly we were all plunged into a world of social distancing. People became more reliant on computer mediated communication than ever before. Outside of those living in your own house, all forms of communication now occurred through video calls, phone calls, and digital messaging. School, Work, Social Events and a wide variety of other social functions were forced onto the world of technology. And as many struggled to find their feet in this new strange world of online interaction and social distancing, conflict broke out and people began turning on one another. Those who were living with families were developing cabin fever, and those who were living alone felt utterly isolated. As tensions rose at home, so too did they arise in our country. In May, riots and violent protests ensued as a result of the death of George Floyd, in November the hotly contested presidential election occurred that left many feeling as they had been cheated out of the presidency. Thus, from this isolated and agitated state, began the Pro-mask vs. Anti-mask debate. The conflict of whether or not people should wear masks is one that has split the country in half, turning friends and family against one another. And this prompted certain questions.

Certainly, the debate over masks was not the first time the internet had exploded over a topic and it will almost certainly not be the last. The creation of the World Wide Web has allowed anyone and everyone to voice their opinions, feelings and concerns. While the internet often seems to be a positive thing, it can also have potential harmful effects. When the conflict over masks started, leaving families and friends torn apart, it led to certain questions to be asked. How does the mask debate occur? How does conflict evolve to tear apart loved ones? What role does social media play in this conflict? Does the inclusion of social media increase or reduce the conflict at hand?

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Interpersonal Communication on Social Media**

If one is to understand how communication on social media affects interpersonal relationships and conflict within those interpersonal relationships one must first understand how communication occurs on social media. Social media bears a great deal of resemblance to face-to-face communication. One way that communication via social media is similar to face-to-face communication is it tends to adhere to Communication Accommodation Theory which suggests that individuals modify their language and form of communication to match the language and form of communication to the person they are talking to. Research suggests this pattern follows online as well as in person. Kwon and Gruzd (2017) looked at people engaging in offensive language online and found that people tend to swear more when others do. In this way, the two forms of communication are similar, although the CMC may be more contagious as Kwon and Gruzd found the lure of joining in crude language to be quite appealing online.

Indeed, the pull of social media can be one that is quite hard to avoid. Many individuals claim to suffer from social media addiction and Katambwe (2020) suggests this may be a result

of social validation and feelings of love. We do not often receive the same praise we do in person as we do when we post an exciting Facebook post or news sharing Snapchat. But while we feel these large crowds giving love and support is just what we need, and we can't get enough of it, Roberts and Dunbar (2011) suggest that larger network sizes reduce our levels of strong ties among friends and family members. Larger groups of followers, friends, family, and others are harder to maintain and often we tend to drift from one another. Roberts and Dunbar (2010) also suggested that feelings of closeness tended to be highest in interpersonal relationships in which people talked frequently and had stronger ties.

These ties may, however, be jeopardized by an individual's ability to create a comprehensible Instagram post, or at least that is what Han (2018) seeks to discover. Many individuals rate others based on the impression one gives off. If one speaks using poor grammar it is easy to assume one is poorly educated while someone who speaks using a large vocabulary may be considered just the opposite. According to Han (2018), a similar occurrence happens through CMC. When looking at factors such as author credibility, interpersonal attraction, communication competence, and intent to interact a significant finding is the strong relationship between long-time users of a social media site and communication quality. Han suggests that by using a form of CMC for an extended time an individual may learn to have a better understanding of that platform and may be more knowledgeable on how to form an effective post to catch the attention of readers.

### **Conflict on Social Media**

Indeed, not all communication that occurs online is positive. Any Facebook or Twitter debater can tell you conflict is deeply imbued in social media. These sites can have negative effects on individuals both on and off the screen. Abbasia, Drouinb, McDanielc, and Dibble

(2019) state that, “Facebook and SNS (Social Networking Sites) use, in general, maybe problematic in romantic relationships because of time displacement, availability of alternative partners, and idealization of others’ relationships” (p. 131). These authors go on to suggest that Facebook over usage can be linked to relational conflict, dissatisfaction, and even emotional disengagement from a partner. Suggesting that perhaps partners with low levels of relational commitment should be wary of Facebook addiction. Social media sites, though intended to connect us, may separate us even further. Nitzburg and Farber (2013) suggest that for some utilizing social media is perfectly fine, but for others it can be completely overwhelming and cause them to detach. The inability to disconnect from and suppress distressing and uncomfortable information can be something many do not know how to cope with and as a result these individuals put up emotional walls as a method of coping.

Conflict on social media can be inferred to occur as a result of several reasons. Lefler and Barak (2012) suggest a key component in conflict on social media maybe its impersonal nature. Specifically, the lack of eye contact prevents individuals from forming a proper interpersonal connection with the individual with whom they are speaking. It was observed by Lefler and Barak that lack of eye-contact was positively associated with higher numbers of self-reported flaming incidents and threats. Lack of eye contact also seemed to contribute to overall negative online disinhibition behavior scores.

However, Social media’s effect on conflict is not all negative. Kashian and Walther (2018) certainly seem to suggest just the opposite. They state, “the results suggest that satisfied individuals rather than dissatisfied individuals benefit more from using asynchronous CMC in conflict” (p. 664). Satisfied individuals reacted in this positive way as a result of reduced flooding, reduced rumination, and increased repair attempts due to less immediate feedback. This

suggests that social media can be a source of good and positivity in conflict. Brown and Livingston (2018) are working towards finding more positive ways to use social media by studying ways that ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) can be used to benefit communities and to help end violence. In studying events in Kenya during elections that resulted in violence, they observed how a peaceful activist group utilized SMS messaging to advocate against violence. The group sent text messages prompting individuals to reconsider violence, they sent text messages emphasizing peace that were designed to outpace messages designed to promote violence, and they even spread truths about the misinformation that was being spread.

Brown and Livingston (2018) noted that some of the major causes of conflict tended to be misinformation in the news. When it comes to conflict in the media it is important to frame topics accurately or individuals could be misinformed. Ahmed, Cho, and Jaidka (2018) studied how news was delivered depending on geopolitical proximity. They found that while both news and social media sources close to a specific event covered the news sharing of said event fairly well, on social media the event seemed to retain equal levels of attention in both close and distant countries. Ahmed, Cho, and Jaidka state, “This suggests the potential of social media to act as an unfettered news network, somewhat less constrained by geographical borders or strategic political ties, which facilitates mass discussion and information dissemination.” (p. 366). Similarly, it was found that the official news often did not give an in-depth analysis of the dramatic events occurring and avoided conversations regarding underlying issues. Twitter users of the same cities pointed out the racial conflicts at hand and criticized authorities. The use of Twitter as a means of sharing news and doing so in a way that bypasses traditional gatekeeping methods is something that can bring great benefits or cause great harm. It can enable people to



speaking truths common media are too afraid to confront, or it can allow individuals to stir up emotions.

### **Adolescents on Social Media**

One of the groups most affected by social media is teenagers and adolescents. According to the Pew Research Center as of 2018 95% of teens in America have a smartphone and 88% have access to a computer. Furthermore, 44% of teens say they use social media several times a day and 45% say they use social media almost constantly. Suffice to say, social media has a huge impact on teenagers and their lives. As such adolescents are highly susceptible to the effect social media can have on their ability to engage in interpersonal communication and as well as conflict.

The effect social media has had on teens is something that has been of great interest to researchers such as White, Weinstein, and Selmen (2016). As such, they conducted a study to observe the effects of social media on friendship challenges. The study observed the occurrence of betrayal, isolation, meanness, and harassment, concern about a friend, and maintenance challenges and found that the use of technology tended to amplify these issues. The opportunity to add an audience onto the field of interpersonal conflict is an occurrence that appears to be detrimental to the parties involved and allowed for conflict to enlarge. Yet Marcick and Boyd (2014) suggest this might not be all negative. As they began their observations on teenage drama played out across the stage of social media, they concluded that perhaps drama is not completely negative. Certainly, drama within teens can create harm, but just as Conflict is necessary and can be positive and beneficial, so too may be drama. Drama allows teens to understand and even theorize their social dynamics. With the inclusion of social media, the scope of drama has

changed, allowing for the addition of an audience. This increases the visibility of teen drama and conflict, allowing adults to take a more active stance.

The influence of audiences in teen conflict does not stop at this. According to Xie, Swift, Cairns, and Cairns (2002), negative social interactions often resulted in groups larger than simple dyads. These researchers observed that outside third-party individuals often affect the conflict at hand and 9% of victims of social aggression were unsure of the identity of the perpetrator. Yet once the perpetrator was identified often open confrontation occurred in the form of either physical or verbal aggression.

Furthermore, the effects of bullying in cyber settings can have drastic effects on adolescents, and Dempsey, Nichols, and Storch (2009) suggest that it can have a positive relationship with social anxiety in youths. This study identified cyber victimization as its own form of victimization, separate from overt or relational victimization. While cyber victimization was found to be linked to social anxiety, a higher level of correlation occurred between relational victimization, and social anxiety.

**Research Question:** How does social media use affect conflict in interpersonal relationships?

### **Methodology**

The aim of this research was to study the effect that the use of social media has on interpersonal conflict. Specifically, the goal was to analyze how use of social media can affect conflict and aggression in interpersonal relationships. It was predicted individuals involved in more frequent usage of interpersonal communication online would experience more conflict and aggression in their interpersonal relationships.

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 200 University of Akron students who were at least 18 years of age or older. The study represents 1% of the population of the University of Akron and thus 200 participants were questioned.

The sample was 61% female, 37% male, .5% other, and 1.5% being prefer not to answer. The sample broke down into 28% 20-year-olds, 16.5% 19-year-olds, 16.5% 21-year-olds, 13.5% 18-year-olds, 11.5% 22-year-olds. These ages made up most of the sample with the ages 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 30+ all ranging between .5% and 5%.

### **Data Collection**

Data was gathered via a short anonymous survey approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). After giving consent (see Appendix B), participants completed survey which was thirteen questions long and asked four different types of questions (see Appendix C). Sampling methods included snowball sampling and email sampling. Emails were sent to a variety of classes in psychology, criminology, philosophy, Spanish, and Engineering containing the survey and informed consent information. The informed consent and links to the survey were posted on various social media, which also asked individuals to either participate in the survey and/or to share the survey with anyone they may know.

The first set of questions pertained to information about the participants usage of social media. This included the kinds of social media participants used, how often they used it, and how they utilized their usage of social media.

The second set of questions pertained to their usage of social media in their interpersonal relationships. This included questions asking the form of social media they use the most to communicate with friends and family.

The third set of questions were about experiences with conflict in their interpersonal relationships in person versus online, particularly using social media. This included questions about what issues upset them the most, how often they engaged in conflict online vs how often they engaged in conflict in person, and what are their styles of conflict on social media vs their styles of conflict in person.

For the variable of social media use (what kind and how much) participants were asked to choose what kinds of social media they interact with, as well as choose between different choices as to how they interact online. This data was used to compare how different types of social media usage contain different levels of interaction and conflict.

For the variable of amount of conflict engaged (online vs in person) participants were asked to choose from a frequency scale.

### **Data Analysis**

After data collection was completed, two key functions were used to analyze it. Data was gathered on Google Forms and entered Google Spreadsheets for analysis. It was desired to examine the percentages of the data and so it was visualized on pie charts and scatterplots for analysis. For the graphs that came in pairs (see charts 2.1 and 2.2, 3.1 and 3.1, 4.1 and 4.2, and 5.1 and 5.2) these were compared against one another to examine differences and similarities. The second key method utilized to analyze the data came into play when analyzing what value participants placed on self and others in conflict online and offline. To do this two scatter plot charts were created. For each chart every time someone chose a low value, a medium value, and a high value it was tallied onto Spreadsheets and then calculated into the scatter plot charts. Once the two charts were completed, they were compared against one another to look for similarities and differences. This process is explained further on when discussing the results below.

**Results**

The first trend identified was that of how often people find themselves on social media per day. Of the 200 participants 36.5% said that they spent 2-4 hours online a day. This was followed by 26.5 percent of participants who said they were on social media 4-6 hours a day. Next was 25.5 percent of participants claiming they spent less than 2 hours on social media a day. This was followed by 7.5%

of participants who claimed they spent 6-8 hours a day on social media. Finally, was the last 4% of participants

What forms of Social Media do you engage in? (choose all that apply)  
200 responses

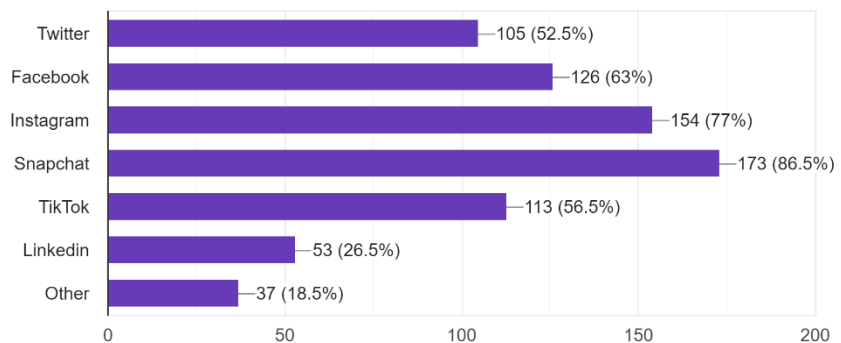


Chart 1

who said they spent more than 8 hours a day on social media. This data supports a trend that on average 63% of Students at the University of Akron spend between 2-6 hours on social media a day. This means that these students spend roughly 1/8 to 3/8 of their day on social media every day.

When asked in what platforms of social media do participants engage, the most prevalent answer was Snapchat at 86.5%. (See Chart 1) This was closely followed by Instagram at 77%. Then Facebook at 63%, TikTok at 56.5%, Twitter at 52.5%, LinkedIn at 26.5%, and other social media ranked at the bottom at 18.5%.

When asked to choose two choices as to how they use social media the most, the answer that was chosen more prevalently was visiting others news feeds at 83.3%. Posting to one's own newsfeed ranked as least popular with only 14.6%. People spent the most time looking at others'

How often would you say you engage in conflict in person?  
200 responses

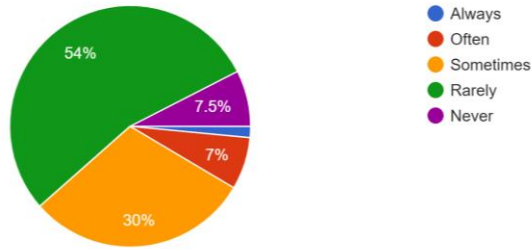


Chart 2.1

news feeds and spent the least amount of time posting to their own. In between these two wide gaps 43.9% of people said they spent the most amount of time in one-on-one interactions, 42.4% said they spent the most time talking in group chats, and 39.4% said they spent the most time

sharing others' posts.

The next part of the analysis examined how individuals interacted online vs in person and how people acted with friends vs family. The first finding was the comparison of how often participants engaged in conflict online vs in person.

On average participants seemed to engage in conflict less online than they did in person. (See Charts 2.1 and 2.2) In person 1.5% of participants admitted to engaging in conflict "always" as compared to on social media where only 1% of participants claimed they engaged in conflict "always". This may not seem like a wide margin of difference but as the answers go down the line the margin grows wider and

wider. Answering that they "often" engage in conflict in person was 7% and on social media was 6%.

Answering that they engage in conflict "sometimes" in person scored 30% and on social media scored 16.5%.

How often would you say you engage in conflict on social media?  
200 responses

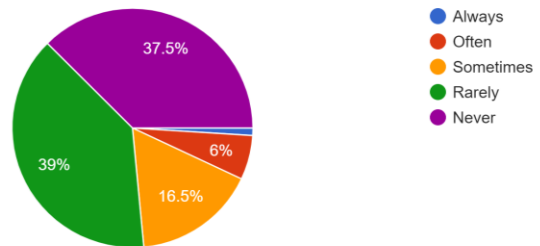


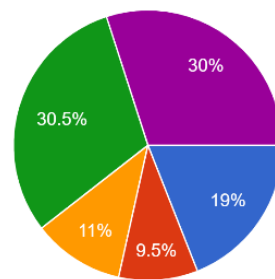
Chart 2.2

Here's where we see the one and only deviation from this pattern. When answering for rarely engaging in conflict 54% did so for in person, yet only 39% of participants said so for social media. For the final answer the pattern returns to before with 7.5% of participants in person choosing “never”, and 37.5% of participants on social media choosing “never”.

Now this brief deviation from the pattern may lead one to believe that this discredits the pattern established. However, if one groups the data into three groups, engages in conflict (for the answers always and often), does not engage in conflict, (for the answers rarely and never), and middle conflict, (for the answers of sometimes), then we see the pattern developed in full. In this way of analyzing the evidence 8.5% of participants in person engage in conflict while only 7% of participants on social media engage in conflict. Further participants who do not engage in conflict are at 61.4% for in person and only 76.5% for on social media. Of course, the middle

answer remains unchanged with in person participants at 30% and social media participants at 16.5%. This evidence supports the initial observation that participants engage less with conflict online vs in person.

How would you describe yourself when engaging in conflict in person?  
200 responses



- Avoiding - I don't want to engage in conflict at all, even if it means hurting...
- Competing - I have to be right when it comes to conflict, even if it means oth...
- Accommodating - I let others be right when it comes to conflict, even if it me...
- Compromising - I'm okay if we both lose a little bit if we also both win a little bit
- Collaborating - I want us both to get what we want without anyone getting...

Chart 3.1

The next two questions asked participants to identify their conflict styles online vs in person. Participants were given five options of conflict styles based on the importance they placed on self-versus-others. These options were Avoiding (low self, low others), Competing

How would you describe yourself when engaging in conflict online?  
 198 responses

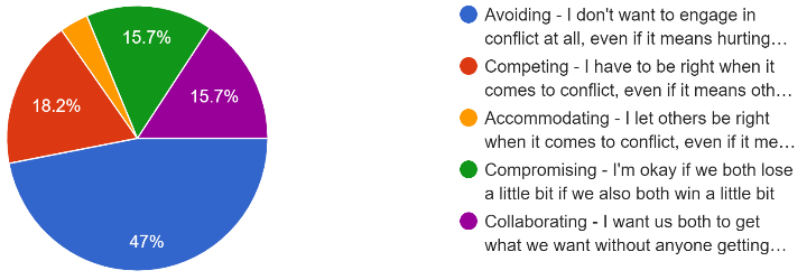
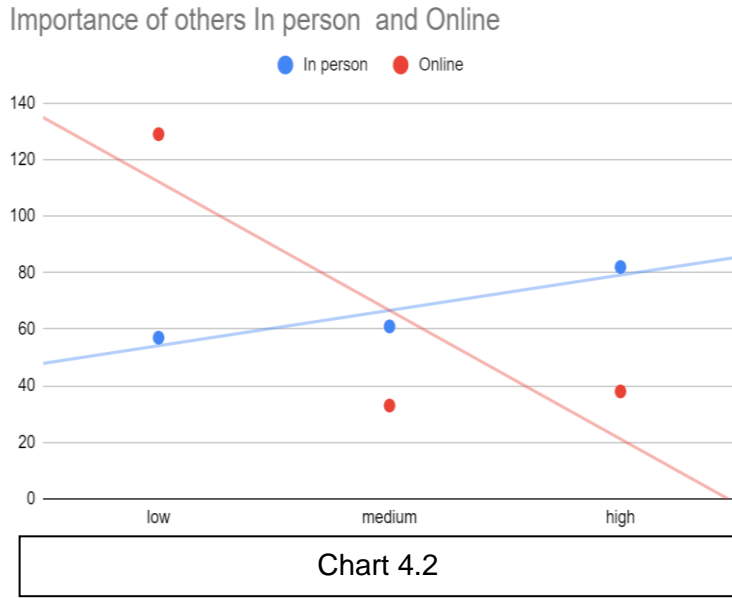


Chart 3.2

(high self, low others),  
 Accommodating (low self, high others), Compromising (medium self, medium others), and Collaborating (high self, high others).

When looking at the initial data it presents itself as thus. Participants who identified themselves as avoiding 19% in person and 47% online. For competing 9.5% of participants chose this for in person while 18.2% of participants chose this for online. When choosing accommodating 11% of candidates fell in this category in person and 3.5% of candidates fell in this category for online. For compromising 30.5% of participants chose this for in person and 15.7% chose this for online. Finally, for the option of collaborating 30% of participants chose this for in person and 15.7% chose this for online. Overall, in comparing the option that had the lowest importance on both self and other (avoiding) and the option that had the highest sense of self and other (collaborating) in person tended to do better. (See Chart 3.1 and 3.2) This seemed to correlate with the data from the previous questions that showed that people engaged in conflict less online than in person. However, this data would suggest that perhaps the quality of conflict was higher in person rather than online.





To help get a sense of how people value themselves vs others online vs in person the two charts below (see charts 4.1 and 4.2) depict the pattern that emerged. To make the Importance of Self chart each person who made a choice that had a low sense of self (avoiding and accommodating) were coded as low,

for compromising was coded as medium, and for each person who chose a choice that had a high sense of self (competing and collaborating) were coded as high. To make the chart for Importance of Others Chart used the same process, but in reverse. With low sense of others being, avoiding and competing, high sense of others being accommodating and collaborating and compromising staying at medium. Overall, In Person tended to have a higher trend towards placing importance on both self and others, whereas online had a lower trend for both self and others. This supports the conclusion reached above that suggests the quality of conflict that occurs in person is higher than online.

The next question posited to participants was “Do you find yourself more confrontational in

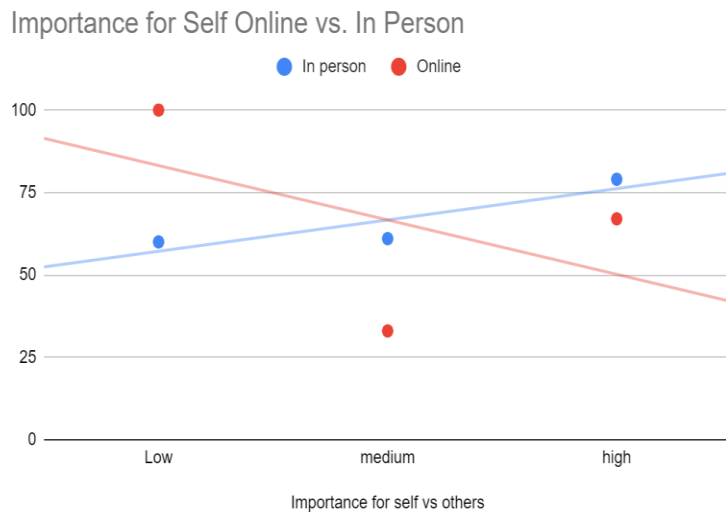


Chart 4.1

person or online?” The most common answer was in person at 32.5%. This was followed by Neither at 23.5%. Next was Online at 22.5%. Finally, Both Equally came in last at 21.5%.

Overall, this collection of data was similar and fairly close to one another, yet in person won out again, further supporting the conclusion drawn above that students at The University of Akron engage in conflict less online.

For the question, “What subjects tend to upset you the most?” a rather large majority mentioned Political Issues at 65.8% followed shortly by Social Justice Issues at 59.3%. These two front runners lead the others by a considerable margin with the

Which form of communication do you use the most to communicate with family?  
200 responses

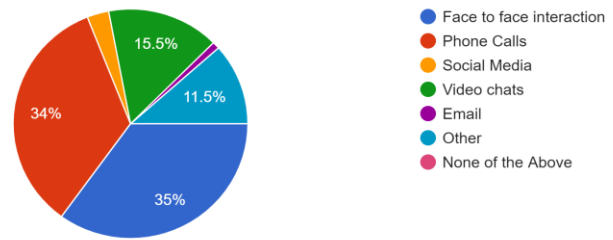


Chart 5.1

next closest answer being Family Conflicts at 42.7%, then Current Events at 40.7%, Friendship Conflicts at 39.7%, and Religious Issues at 31.7%. Another major gap then occurs before “other” at 9% and finally Celebrity Gossip brings up the rear at 8%.

Finally, the last piece of data collected compared how participants interact with family

Which form of communication do you use the most to communicate with friends?  
199 responses

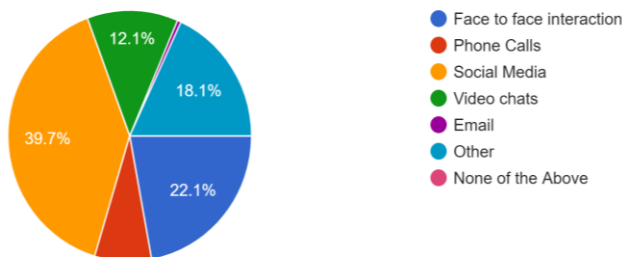


Chart 5.2

versus friends. Participants were asked what form of communication they use the most to interact with families or friends from the list of face-to-face interaction, phone

calls, social media, video chats, email, other and none of the above. Of these options participants chose the following: For face-to-face interaction 35% participants used this the most to communicate with families while only 22.1% of participants used this to interact with friends. For phone calls 34% of participants used this form of communication to interact with families and 7.5% of participants used this form of communication to interact with friends. For social media only 3% of participants used this form of communication to engage with families while 39.7% of participants used this form of communication to engage with friends. For video chats usage results were fairly even with 15.5% of participants using this for families and 12.1% of participants using this for friends. For email both were low with 1% of participants using this to communicate with families and .5% using it to communicate with friends. Finally, 11.5% of participants listed themselves as using “other” to communicate with family and 18.1% of participants listed themselves as using “other: to communicate with friends. On average the most common form of communication used to keep in contact with family was face to face interaction and phone call. However, the most common form of communication for friends was social media followed by face to face and other.

### **Discussion**

After all the data has been analyzed three major findings address the research question how social media use affects conflict in interpersonal relationships. The first conclusion to be drawn from this study is that for students here at The University of Akron social media is a form of communication that is utilized often and is utilized to connect with one's friends. The survey data showed that 39.7% of survey participants used social media the most to connect with friends. Not only that but the survey data also showed that 63% of participants spend between 2-6 hours on social media a day. This data correlates with research done by Kwon and Gruzd

which shows that social media can be a highly addictive form of communication. Ironically enough though, we see that the addictiveness of social media only extends to friends rather than families. It could be inferred that the reason behind this is that Social Media is a medium that is popular amongst youth and college students and less likely to be used by older generations.

Although youth seem to be slightly addicted to social media and spend a great deal of time on it, they seem to engage in conflict less via this form of media than they do in person. This information is surprising as it seems as if conflict is played out online frequently. However, when looking at this data it shows that participants' likelihood to not engage in conflict online is roughly 15% higher than their likelihood to not engage in conflict in person. Based on the data two key elements may contribute to this low engagement in conflict online.

First, it would seem that a majority of individuals online use social media the most to look at one another's news feeds rather than to communicate with one another, either in a one on one or group setting. By far the most popular activity to engage in on social media was to view other newsfeeds, not interacting with them, not even putting out information about themselves, but rather looking at what others post about themselves. Thus, it could be implied part of the reason social media has such a lower level of engagement in conflict is due to the lack of actual interaction between persons on social media.

The second reason, based on the data that was gathered as to why participants experience lower levels of engagement in conflict on social media, has to do with participants' form of engagement in conflict online. An overwhelming majority of participants when describing their conflict styles online choose avoiding. Thus, we can infer that perhaps the reason participants do not engage in conflict is because they take an avoidance stance to the existence and occurrence of conflict on social media.

It is when looking at why students do not engage in social media online that the final and most interesting conclusion from this study came to light. Based on the data gathered, college students at The University of Akron tend to engage in the avoidance strategy online, a strategy that has a lower self-concept and poorer value for others more than they do in person. As stated above, participants overwhelmingly identified themselves as avoiding conflict online. However, they also had a fairly standard falling trend of having both low values on selves and others when communicating as opposed to in person, which had a rising trend of having both high values for self and others when communicating.

In summary the data lines up well with Roberts and Dunbar's (2011) observation that large circles on social media produced weaker ties. Thus, due to these weaker social media ties students feel a lower sense of value towards those whom they are engaging in conflict with online. Similarly, this data seemed to confirm findings by Lefler and Barak (2012) who noted that the lack of eye contact on social media was harmful to conflict, presumably explaining this poorer quality of conflict on social media.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study was limited in a few ways and could be modified as such. This was a study performed by a single researcher with no grant or financial support and limited time, and experience to give to this project. Similarly, due to limited resources the sample came from a small population size.

For future researchers the following actions are recommended. First, this study could receive far more accurate results if it were performed by a team, by different specialists of different fields. An interdisciplinary approach could integrate useful theoretically important variety from psychology, communication, and sociology perspectives. Additionally, looking at a

larger population and sample size, perhaps from multiple colleges could render more accurate findings. Finally, future studies would benefit from narrowing in on the questions posited above.

### **Conclusion**

Communication is a feature of our world and our lives that lives in a constant state of flux. As society and technology evolve so too must communication, and our understanding of it therein. Research has been, is currently, and will continue to investigate how communication has changed and evolved overtime, as well as what kind of effects it has on subject matter such as conflict and interpersonal relationships. In this small study, it was able to determine that for students at The University of Akron social media is the primary source for engaging with friends and, while there is a low quantity of conflict that occurs online for this group, there is also a low level of quality of this conflict. As research persists in studying this specific form of communication, we shall gain a more and more clear picture of how communication as a whole occurs, and as such be able to better communicate with one another.

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## Appendix A

IRB Permission  
Office of Research Administration  
Akron, OH 44325-2102

Date: 3/5/2021

To: Katherine G. Yoak

From: Kathryn Watkins Associate Director and IRB Administer

IRB Number: 20210215

Title: The Dangers of Free Speech in the Modern World

Approval Date: 3/5/2021

Thank you for submitting your Request for Exemption to the IRB for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies for exemption from the federal regulations under the category below:

Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recordings, and subjects have prospectively agreed to the intervention.

Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, biospecimens specimens, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Exemption 7 – Research involving the use of a broad consent for the storage or maintenance of identifiable information and/or biospecimens for future research.

Exemption 8 – Research involving the use of a broad consent for the use of identifiable information and/or biospecimens for future research.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

## Appendix B

## Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Katherine Yoak, an undergraduate honors student in the Department of Communication at The University of Akron. The purpose of this research is to find out how computer-mediated-communication affects conflict in interpersonal relationships.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete this anonymous web-based survey. This survey should take no more than 15 minutes and I hope to recruit 200 participants. To help get as many responses as possible please feel free to share this email with as many people as you can, provided they are 18 and up and current students at The University of Akron.

This survey will not collect any identifiable information and no one will be able to connect your responses to you. Your anonymity is further protected by not asking you to sign and return a consent form. By continuing with this survey and answering the questions below you are giving your consent to participate in this study. Please know that if you choose to participate in this survey you are free to stop at any time. Please print this introduction for future reference.

If you have any questions about this study, you may call me at 567-303-1358 or email my advisor, Dr. Walter, at [hlrosen@uakron.edu](mailto:hlrosen@uakron.edu). This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

This is an anonymous survey attempting to answer the question "Does social media have a positive or negative impact on conflict?" For the purposes of this survey we will define conflict as any tension which is experienced when one individual perceives that one's needs or desires are likely to be thwarted or frustrated by another. We will also define social media as interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Remember that all responses are anonymous so please try to be as accurate and honest as possible, and thank you for participating.

## Appendix C

## Survey Instrument

1. By clicking "I Agree" below, you certify that you have read the information provided and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Clicking "Agree" below will serve as consent to participate in this online series of questionnaires.
  1. I agree
  2. I disagree
2. What forms of social media do you engage in? (choose all that apply)
  1. Twitter
  2. Facebook
  3. Instagram
  4. Snapchat
  5. TikTok
  6. LinkedIn
  7. Other
3. On average how many hours a day would you say you spend on social media?
  1. Less than 2 hours
  2. 2-4 hours
  3. 4-6 hours
  4. 6-8 hours
  5. More than 8 hours
4. How would you describe how you use social media the most? (Choose the two best answers)
  1. One on one interactions
  2. Posting to news feeds
  3. Viewing others news feeds
  4. Sharing posts
  5. Talking in group chats
5. Which form of communication do you use the most to communicate with family?
  1. Face to face interaction
  2. Phone calls
  3. Social media
  4. Video chats
  5. Email
  6. Other
  7. None of the above
6. Which form of communication do you use the most to communicate with friends?
  1. Face to face interaction
  2. Phone calls

3. Social media
  4. Video chats
  5. Email
  6. Other
  7. None of the above
7. Which subjects tend to upset you the most? (Choose all that apply)
1. Social Justice Issues (BLM, LGBTQ+, Feminism, etc)
  2. Political Issues
  3. Religious Issues
  4. Celebrity Gossip
  5. Current Events
  6. Friendship Conflicts
  7. Family Conflicts
  8. Other
8. How often would you say you engage in conflict in person?
1. Always
  2. Often
  3. Sometimes
  4. Rarely
  5. Never
9. How often would you say you engage in conflict on social media?
1. Always
  2. Often
  3. Sometimes
  4. Rarely
  5. Never
10. How would you describe yourself when engaging in conflict in person?
1. Avoiding - I don't want to engage in conflict at all, even if it means hurting others and me
  2. Competing - I have to be right when it comes to conflict, even if it means others get hurt
  3. Accommodating - I let others be right when it comes to conflict, even if it means I get hurt
  4. Compromising - I'm okay if we both lose a little bit if we also both win a little bit
  5. Collaborating - I want us both to get what we want without anyone getting hurt or losing
11. How would you describe yourself when engaging in conflict on social media?
1. Avoiding - I don't want to engage in conflict at all, even if it means hurting others and me

2. Competing - I have to be right when it comes to conflict, even if it means others get hurt
  3. Accommodating - I let others be right when it comes to conflict, even if it means I get hurt
  4. Compromising - I'm okay if we both lose a little bit if we also both win a little bit
  5. Collaborating - I want us both to get what we want without anyone getting hurt or losing
12. Do you find yourself more confrontational online or in person?
1. Both Equally
  2. Online
  3. In person
  4. Neither
13. What age are you?
1. 18
  2. 19
  3. 20
  4. 21
  5. 22
  6. 23
  7. 24
  8. 25
  9. 26
  10. 27
  11. 28
  12. 29
  13. 30
  14. 30+
14. Are you male or female?
1. Male
  2. Female
  3. Other
  4. Prefer not to answer