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THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

PARENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL RESPONSES
TO MORALLY SALIENT SOCIAL MEDIA SCENARIOS

RESEARCH PAPER

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Parents and Social Media

Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Responses to Morally Salient Social Media Scenarios

Research Paper

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'I THINK IT [SOCIAL MEDIA] IS A DISTRACTION FROM FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION AND THAT THE LATTER IS SUFFERING FROM LACK OF PRACTICE'.

Parent

Abstract

Given the vast amount of time that individuals typically spend online, it has never been more important to examine the influences of social media use, as well as the role that parents and caregivers might play in ensuring that their adolescent has a healthy relationship with social media. In response to parental concerns about the impact of social media on young people's character and moral development, this research paper focusses on parental regulation of adolescents' social media use, with a particular emphasis on morally salient scenarios involving the virtues of empathy and honesty. Social media scenarios where empathy and honesty could be deemed lacking were developed to explore adolescents' perceptions of possible regulation strategies that their parents might adopt in response to these morally salient scenarios. The findings suggest that, according to adolescents, preventative strategies are most commonly adopted by parents and parents are purported to use more controlling strategies in response to morally salient scenarios. Adolescents regard less controlling strategies as 'fairer' but also recognise the appropriateness of active regulation techniques, such as monitoring. Parental regulation could predict significant levels of variance in both frequency and duration of adolescents' social media use, suggesting that parenting strategies can influence the use of social media sites. The research described here should provide practical advice and reassurance on strategies to regulate social media use in young people, especially in situations where moral values are implicated.



1 Purpose and Background

Social media is an important influence on children and adolescents; according to a 2015 Ofcom report, 74% of 12–15-year-olds and 93% of 16–24-year-olds in the UK have a social media profile. The average weekly time spent on the internet for these cohorts has been estimated at 20.5 hours and 18.9 hours respectively (Ofcom, 2015). Given the vast amount of time that individuals typically spend online, it has never been more important to examine the influences of such media use, as well as the role that parents and caregivers might play in ensuring that their child has a healthy relationship with social media.

This research paper focusses on parental regulation of adolescents' social media use, with a particular emphasis on morally salient scenarios that involve the virtues of empathy and honesty. This consideration of character and moral values on social media adds to a growing body of literature in this field (eg, James, 2014; Harrison, 2016) and responds to parental concerns that have recently been highlighted (Morgan, 2016). The research presented here developed and utilised social media scenarios where empathy and honesty could be deemed lacking. Specifically, this study explored adolescents' perceptions of possible regulation strategies that their parents might adopt in response to these morally salient scenarios. The objective was to provide important indications of whether various techniques are likely to be well received and accepted by adolescents.

The specific research questions addressed in this report are:

- What strategies do parents use to regulate their children's social media use?
- How are these parental regulation strategies perceived by their children?

1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA USE

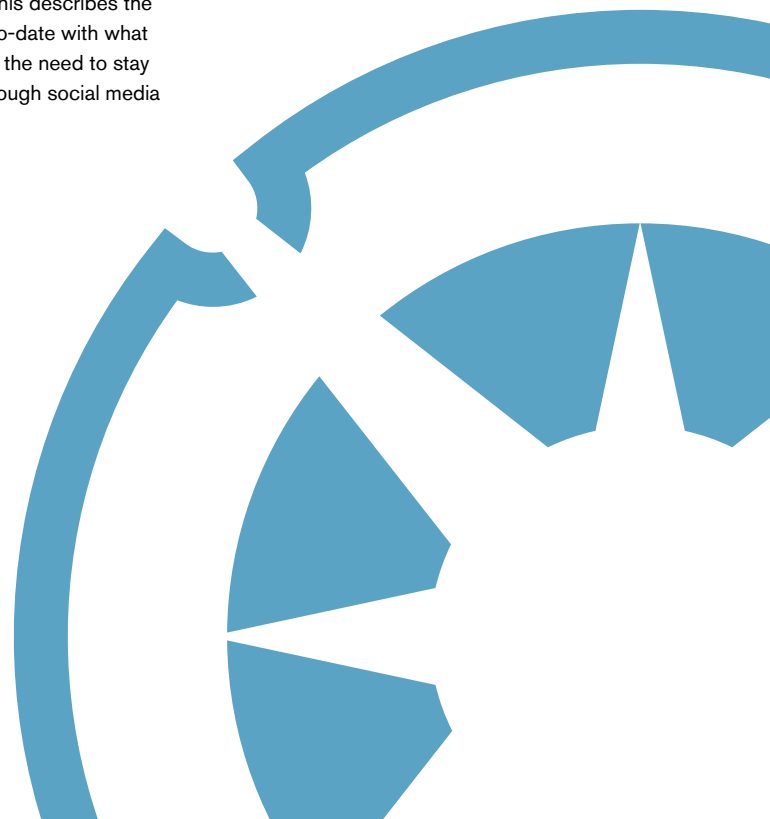
Previous research has suggested that the impact of social media use on young people can be both positive and negative and is likely influenced by numerous personal, cultural and socioeconomic factors (see for example, Allen *et al.*, 2014; Seabrook, Kern and Rickard, 2016). In terms of its benefits, social media use has been linked to greater social connectedness or feelings of belonging (Valkenberg and Peter, 2009), whereby social media platforms can facilitate new and ongoing relationships and allow young people to create stronger bonds with individuals that they already know (Lenhart *et al.*, 2015). Elder (2014: 287) goes as far as to suggest that 'virtue friendships' (the best kind of friendships, according to Aristotle) can occur via social media: 'Social media allows friends to share distinctively human activities such as conversation and exchange of thoughts, mutual development of ideas, making art and playing games. Aristotelians should thus conclude that the best kind of friendship is available online'. Fostering belongingness via social media, therefore, might have positive social, moral and personal benefits for users.

The strive for belongingness and social connection, however, might not always be described as positive. A more recent term to enter our 21st-century vocabulary is 'FoMo', or *fear of missing out*. This describes the compulsion to stay up-to-date with what is happening online and the need to stay connected to others through social media

platforms. Research from Madden *et al.* (2013) suggests that teenagers (in the US) feel socially compelled to use social media. 'FoMo' has been associated with lower mood and lower levels of life satisfaction (Pryzblyski *et al.*, 2013) which indicates the potential dangers with being connected to others at all times. This therefore suggests that there is an optimal level of social connection and belongingness on social media which could be pushed too far; to pick up on the Aristotelean theme, belongingness online might be considered as having a potential 'golden mean', although no one has as yet clearly identified what that medial condition would be.

Alongside possible personal benefits and negative experiences, social media sites are also a place where moral values are put to the test, just as they are offline, and social media can inevitably lead to both moral and immoral behaviours, depending on the context.

James (2014) has demonstrated through a series of case studies that properties of the internet (such as invisibility and physical distance) may, in some circumstances, allow internet users to act immorally. Through the 'Good Play Project' on digital citizenship, James examined how tweens, teens and young adults (ranging from 10 to 25 years



old), may be encouraged to act dishonestly. The discrepancy between online and offline behaviours is neatly summarised by 21-year-old Christina: 'Well in real life, I'd love to do this and get away with it, but if you have any morals or have half a conscience, you'd know that you just couldn't do that to a friend. But online you can throw all these morals and that conscience to the wind' (James, 2014: 75).

However, not all online interactions allow for such anonymity or disinhibition; social media profiles are often closely linked to offline selves and, therefore, social network sites might impose some of the same (moral) expectations as face-to-face interactions do. Harrison (2014), for example, demonstrated that whilst a proportion of respondents (aged 11–14 years) did engage in uncompassionate acts (i.e., a third of the sample admitted writing unkind words online), they also used the internet as a tool for compassionate behaviour; such research suggests that the internet may be a playground for both virtuous and non-virtuous behaviours.

The focus on character and virtues on social media is a salient one which is reflected in the concerns of parents. A 2016 poll of UK parents on this topic found that 55% of the 1,738 respondents agreed that social media hinders/undermines a young person's character or moral development (see Morgan, 2016). When asked to identify the character strengths that they believed were lacking on social media, 24% named forgiveness and self-control, and 21% identified honesty as lacking. However, it is not an entirely bleak picture as 72% of respondents reported seeing content that contained a positive moral message at least once a day.

In light of such concerns, it seems wise to consider the role of parents in regulating social media use, particularly when morally salient issues arise. Davis (2013) suggests that parents may play an important role when exploring the impact of digital media use. However, the details of this role are largely understudied.

1.2 PARENTAL REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Parents often attempt to mediate their children's media consumption and can adopt preventative techniques to ensure that media messages do not conflict with important moral values and virtues espoused in the home (Padilla-Walker and Thompson, 2005). Padilla-Walker and Thompson (2005) examined how parents dealt with (hypothetical) situations where their adolescent might encounter a conflicting values message (some pertaining to moral issues, some not). The researchers noted the use of various parenting strategies which may change based on how important the value is to the parent. Parents were most likely to use 'pre-arming' or 'reasoned cocooning' strategies when combatting conflicting messages. Pre-arming refers to the anticipation of conflicting values and preparing children to deal with these conflicts; parents allow their children to be exposed to the threat, yet offer strategies to overcome the threat and reminders of family values. Reasoned cocooning involves safeguarding against potential threats through restricting access (e.g., to certain peers, or TV/media) and explaining why this restriction has been put in place. Conversely, parents were least likely to use 'deference' techniques (allowing children to make up their own minds without preparation or reminders of family values) or 'controlled cocooning' (cocooning without explanation). Further to this, regression analyses demonstrated how the importance of the relevant value could predict parental strategy use; when parents reported a value to be particularly important to them, they were more likely to use more controlling conflict strategies. This indicates parents can be influential in helping their children develop practical wisdom or *phronesis* in adjudicating value conflicts (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010), especially through strategies of pre-arming and reasoned cocooning.

By conducting an online survey with a large sample of children and parents in the UK, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) identified

four distinct types of parental mediation of children's internet use: active co-use, interaction restrictions, technical restrictions (including the use of software to restrict access), and monitoring. Interestingly, Livingstone and Bober (2006) demonstrate that parents might engage in higher levels of monitoring strategies than their children are aware of. They note that 41% of parents report checking their child's computer after use to monitor their activity, however, only 9% of children report being aware of the fact that their parents monitor their internet use in such a way.

In terms of what this means for character and moral values, research has suggested that when parents are directly involved in their adolescents' media activities, adolescents can feel closer to their parents and engage in more prosocial behaviours (Coyne *et al.*, 2014; Coyne and Smith, 2014). Conversely, adolescents who spend more time using their phones and social networking sites independently of parents feel less connected to their parents and are less likely to engage in prosocial behaviours. It has therefore been suggested that sharing media interactions may offer parents and children the opportunity to discuss important prosocial values and virtues and strengthen their relationship (Coyne and Smith, 2014). More research is needed, however, to explore the particular types of parental strategy that are effective when attempting to regulate social media use and how these regulation techniques are perceived by children which will, in turn, influence their success. Patrick and Gibbs (2012), for instance, highlight that when parenting behaviours are deemed fair and appropriate, their children are more likely to attend to the intended message and internalise this message. Therefore, it should follow that regulation of social media use that is deemed fair and appropriate by adolescents is more likely to be accepted and internalised (see also Padilla-Walker and Carlo, 2004). In the context of moral messages, this fair and appropriate regulation could increase the successful growth of moral functioning online.

2 Methodology

2.1 SELF-REPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

This research utilised online self-report questionnaires to explore adolescents' social media use and their perceptions of parental regulation of social media use. The questionnaire first gauged participants' demographic profile, including questions about their gender, age, religion, family composition and main caregiver. The remainder of the questionnaire was comprised of two sections: the first gauged adolescents' social media use and the second explored parental regulation strategies. These two sections are described below, followed by participant information and ethical considerations.

SECTION 1 – Social media sites, and frequency and duration of use:

After being given a definition of social media sites¹, participants were asked to identify the social media sites that they typically used (at least once a week) and to signal which site they used most frequently. To gauge both frequency and duration of social media use, participants were asked to self-report (a) how often they checked or visited social media sites on a weekday and on a weekend day, using a scale that ranged from 0 = *None* to 5 = *Over 50 times*, and (b) how long they typically spent on social media sites on a weekday and weekend day, using a scale ranging from 0 = *No time* to 6 = *Up to 8 hours*.

SECTION 2 – Parental regulation of social media:

This second section of the questionnaire explored parental regulation of social media use, as perceived by the adolescents themselves. Three social media scenarios were explored: Scenario 1 was a general scenario around safety; Scenario 2 was a scenario involving honesty/authenticity; and Scenario 3 involved

empathy (see Figure 1). The full scenarios and associated questions can be seen in the Appendix. However, for ease of understanding, the premise of these scenarios are briefly described below and an example is given in Figure 1.

Scenario 1 (Safety): This scenario posited that a news report had highlighted safety concerns around the use of a social media site that the adolescent frequently visited.

Scenario 2 (Honesty/Authenticity): This scenario presented a situation in which the adolescent posted content that was not a completely accurate representation of what had happened in real life.

Scenario 3 (Empathy): This scenario described a context in which the adolescent posted content without realising how it might negatively impact another social media user.

Participants were asked to imagine that this scenario arose and were presented with a list of possible parental reactions. Each of these reactions referred to a parental regulation strategy outlined in previous research (Padilla-Walker and Thompson, 2005; Livingstone and Bober, 2006). There were two possible 'pre-arming' responses; two 'reasoned cocooning' responses; two 'controlled cocooning responses'; two 'deference' responses; two 'monitoring' responses; and two 'co-use' responses. Respondents were asked to rate how likely it was that their parent/guardian (defined as their 'main caregiver') would invoke each of these strategies in response to the scenario (1 = *Extremely unlikely* to 5 = *Extremely likely*).

After rating all 12 strategies, participants were asked to pick the option that their parent would

be most likely to do. They were also given the choice of 'none of these' here, at which point they were prompted to describe an alternative parental response. Following this, participants rated how 'fair' they perceived this (most likely) parental response to be, using another 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *Extremely unfair* and 5 = *Extremely fair*².

This process was then repeated for the other two scenarios to explore (in)consistency in perceived parenting strategies and allow comparisons across general situations (Scenario 1) and those that involve moral values (Scenarios 2 and 3).

Participants were recruited through contact with UK secondary schools; a total of four schools took part. Of the 767 secondary school students who responded to this online questionnaire, 689 aged between 12 and 16 years (mean age = 13.6) were included in analysis³. Overall, the questionnaire took an average of 21 minutes to complete and each of the schools administered the questionnaire during class time. The demographic breakdown of the analysed sample, across the four schools, can be seen in Table 1.

2.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

A couple of caveats should be recognised here with regard to recruitment. Schools were recruited on a voluntary basis and, therefore, it is likely that these schools already had an interest in this research area. Further to this, and as will be noted from Table 1, a large proportion of this sample came from a boys-only school which created an unbalanced distribution across genders. In response to this, some analyses described in the Findings Section have been run with the exclusion of School D (these occasions are identified in the text).

¹ When referring to 'social media sites', this refers to websites or apps that allow you to: build up a 'network' of friends or online connections; create or share content with other people; share information about yourself and build a 'public profile' that shows who you are. Examples of popular social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat.

² Please note that respondents were also asked to provide a qualitative description of what they think is the best thing that parents/guardians could do in this situation; for brevity this qualitative analysis is not explored here.

³ In the 'data cleaning' process, 14 participants were excluded from analysis due to double entries (marked by the same name and matching demographic information); 16 participants were excluded due to their lack of social media use; 31 participants were excluded due to unreasonably short completion times of under 15 minutes; and 17 participants were excluded due to missing crucial information for analysis.

2.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study received full ethical approval from the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during completion of the online questionnaires. As respondents were under the age of 18, informed consent was sought from parents/caregivers on an opt-out basis.

'I TRY AND TEACH MY CHILDREN ABOUT HONESTY AND IF THEY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO DISCUSS IT WITH US.'

Parent

Figure 1: Empathy Scenario from Section 2 of Questionnaire⁴

Scenario 3: Your parent (or guardian) notices that you and your online friends don't seem to think about how your posts can affect one another. He/ She sees that you have written a post that is likely to upset someone else and you don't realise it. This is not the first time that online posts on this site have affected your friendships. Imagine that this has happened. How likely is it that your parent (or guardian) will do the following?

Remember, when answering these questions please think about the person who you said was your main caregiver (i.e, the person who looks after you most of the time).

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Not Sure	Likely	Extremely likely	Regulation type
A. Discuss the potential impact of your online behaviour with you						Pre-arming
B. Ask you to change your behaviour on this site after telling you why they think this is important						Reasoned cocooning
C. Ask for you to explain to him/her why this happens online						Deference
D. Show you how you can change your behaviour on the social media site						Co-use
E. Prevent you from using the site anymore						Controlled cocooning
F. Begin watching what you post on the social media site						Monitoring
G. Offer advice on the difference between communicating online and offline and how this could affect your friendships						Pre-arming
H. Limit your access to the site at home by removing mobiles, laptops, tablets (or other technology)						Controlled cocooning
I. Use the social media site with you from now on						Co-use
J. Ask you to show him/her what you do on the site from now on						Monitoring
K. Explain how this could be damaging to your friendship and, as a result, limit your time on the social media site						Reasoned cocooning
L. Understand that you know what you are doing and leave you to carry on as you were						Deference

⁴ Examples of parental regulation strategies are labelled in the right-hand column here to aid understanding; these labels were not made available to participants in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Demographic Information for the Sample included in Analyses

	School A	School B	School C	School D
School Description	Co-ed, selective secondary (approx. 836 students)	Co-ed secondary (approx. 1,025 students)	Co-ed secondary (approx. 780 students)	Partially selective boys school (approx. 1,244 students)
Number of participants	78	94	128	389
Age range of participants	12–13 years	14–15 years	12–14 years	12–16 years
Gender of participants	Male: 42 (54%); Female: 36 (46%)	Male: 57 (61%); Female: 37 (39%)	Male: 59 (46%); Female: 69 (54%)	Male: 389 (100%)
Ethnicity (most prevalent in sample)	86% White British	88% White British	54% White British 10% Other White Background 9% Black British African/ Caribbean	33% White British 24% Asian British Indian 12% Asian British Pakistani
Religion (most prevalent in sample)	31% Christian 33% Atheist 22% Don't know	12% Christian 57% Atheist 13% Don't know	28% Christian 32% Atheist 11% Don't know 9% Muslim	20% Christian 25% Atheist 15% Muslim 19% Hindu
Practice Religion (Yes/No)	72% No 3% Yes	83% No 2% Yes	63% No 20% Yes	73% No 15% Yes
% with Free School Meals (as reported by participants)	5%	4%	12%	2%



3 Findings

3.1 SOCIAL MEDIA USE

The modal score for the frequency with which social media sites were checked/visited (on both weekdays and weekend days) was up to 10 times a day. The equivalent modal scores for the duration of time spent on social media on both a weekday and weekend day was between 1 and 2 hours.

In terms of the social media sites used on a daily or weekly basis, the most popular sites in this sample were YouTube (94%); Instagram (73%); Snapchat (64%); and Facebook (45%). When asked which site they used most frequently, 47% of the sample said YouTube; 24% Snapchat, 17% Instagram and 6% Facebook.

3.2 PARENTAL REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

This next part of the findings section explores parents⁵ regulation of social media, as reported by their children. Please note that in order to explore whether gender of the participant acted as a possible interaction variable with parent strategy this analysis was limited to Schools A–C to ensure a similar number of participants across gender and school. Therefore, 284 participants are included in the description and analysis below.⁶ To recap, participants were asked to specify who their main caregiver was and to answer the regulation questions in terms of what their main caregiver was likely to do on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Extremely unlikely* to 5 = *Extremely likely*. Of this sample, 81% answered these questions about their mother, 10% about their father and 2.5% about an older sibling.

The first part of the analysis involved creating a composite score for each of the parenting strategies across the three different scenarios. That is, in Scenario 1 (on safety) the two responses to the pre-arming questions were summed to give a 'pre-arming score' that could range from 2–10. This was repeated for each parenting strategy across all three scenarios, see Table 2.

From the means in Table 2 it is apparent that the participants reported that their parents were more likely to use a 'pre-arming' strategy than any other strategy, and this was true across all three scenarios. There appears, however, to be no standard pattern in responding across the three scenarios; for instance, in the honesty scenario monitoring seems to receive higher scores relative to the other two scenarios.

In order to explore patterns of responding across strategies and scenarios, a mixed ANOVA was conducted with scenario (3 levels) and strategy (6 levels) as repeated measures variables, and gender (2 levels), school (3 levels), and year group (3 levels) included as between-subjects variables.

The results of this mixed ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of parenting strategy ($F(5, 2760) = 53.49, p < .001, \eta^2p = .162$), suggesting that the different strategies are not reported (by adolescents) as being equally likely to be used by parents. Indeed, the only strategies that are not reported as being significantly more/less likely from one another are co-use and controlled cocooning; these happen to be the two strategies which received the lowest average means. Therefore, adolescents in this sample reported that the strategies that involve the highest levels of parental control are least likely to be implemented by parents.

Conversely, the least controlling strategy of deference, where parents defer to their children's judgement, is only the fourth most likely (or the third *least* likely) strategy to be used according to respondents.

As expected, the analysis also revealed a significant interaction between scenario and parenting strategy ($F(10, 2760) = 18.23, p < .001, \eta^2p = .062$). An exploration of the means (see Table 2) revealed that parents were considerably more likely to use pre-arming strategies in the 'safety scenario' than in the 'honesty' or 'empathy' scenarios ($p < .001$).

Deference was rated as more likely in response to the safety scenario than the two moral scenarios (honesty: $p < .001$; empathy: $p = .07$). In terms of the most 'controlling' parental strategies, participants reported that parents would be more likely to use reasoned cocooning in response to the empathy scenario than in the honesty or safety scenarios ($p < .001$), and controlled cocooning was more likely in the honesty scenario than the other two scenarios ($p < .001$). Monitoring was reported as more likely in response to the scenario on honesty than empathy ($p < .01$) and co-use was reported as more likely in response to the empathy scenario than the safety scenario ($p < .05$). These differences in strategy use across scenarios indicate that parental regulation is dependent on the context being explored.

In the mixed ANOVA, a significant interaction between parenting strategy and gender was also observed ($F(5, 2760) = 5.64, p < .01, \eta^2p = .020$). Females tended to report higher likelihood ratings across most of the parenting strategies (giving way to a main effect of gender, $p < .01$). However, the parenting style x gender interaction appears to be due to a lower likelihood of deference reported by females across all three scenarios ($M = 5.67, SE = .10$; $M = 5.86, SE = .102$).

⁵ When referring to parents this is inclusive of the main caregiver identified by the participants which may have been a mother, father, guardian or older sibling.

⁶ This total is 284 rather than 300 as 16 participants did not complete all three scenarios. Of these 284 included in analysis, 147 were male and 137 female; 73 from School A, 90 from School B and 121 from School C; 156 were in Year 8, 38 in Year 9, and 90 in Year 10.

Table 2: Mean Scores based on Adolescents' Likelihood Ratings Across the Six Parental Strategies and Three Scenarios

Parenting Strategy:	Scenario 1 – Safety Mean Score (SD)	Scenario 2 – Honesty Mean Score (SD)	Scenario 3 – Empathy Mean Score (SD)	Overall Mean Score (SD)
Pre-Arming	7.18 (2.24)	6.59 (2.22)	6.54 (2.17)	6.79 (1.95)
Reasoned Cocooning	5.75 (2.27)	6.13 (2.10)	6.56 (2.18)	6.18 (1.87)
Controlled Cocooning	5.11 (2.28)	5.61 (2.37)	5.09 (2.11)	5.27 (2.02)
Deference	5.86 (1.59)	5.68 (1.65)	5.74 (1.41)	5.80 (1.20)
Monitoring	5.79 (2.53)	6.04 (2.26)	5.72 (2.32)	5.87 (2.15)
Co-use	5.27 (2.27)	5.43 (2.16)	5.43 (2.05)	5.38 (1.91)
N	284	284	284	284

3.2.1 Perceived 'fairness' of Parental Strategies

Using the full sample, this research also explored the perceived fairness of parental regulation strategies. It is apparent from previous research that parental strategies deemed more 'fair' or 'appropriate' by children are accepted and internalised more readily (Padilla-Walker and Carlo, 2004). Therefore, of particular interest here was whether certain parenting strategies for regulating social media use were deemed more fair than others and whether this would change as a function of context (i.e., across the three scenarios).

As part of the online questionnaire, participants were asked to pick the parenting strategy that their parents were most likely to use for each of the three scenarios (with an additional option of 'none'). They were then asked to rate how fair they believed this to be from 1 = *Extremely unfair* to 5 = *Extremely fair*. The frequency of participants who picked each strategy across the three scenarios can be seen in Chart 1.

Using these variables, a multivariate ANOVA was conducted with scenario (3 levels) and 'most likely parenting style' (7 levels) as the independent variables and participants' fairness rating as the dependent variable. Gender, school and year group were entered as covariates given the demographic differences outlined above.

The pattern of fairness ratings across parenting strategies and scenarios can be seen in Chart 2. The results revealed a significant main effect of 'most likely strategy' ($p < .001$) and an interaction between most likely style and scenario that was approaching significance ($p = .07^7$). Perhaps unsurprisingly, from the adolescents' point of view, deference was rated as the most fair of the possible parenting strategies ($M = 4.14$, $SE = .08$, $N = 145$), closely followed by pre-arming ($M = 4.11$, $SE = .06$, $N = 261$). Monitoring received the third highest mean fairness rating ($M = 3.82$, $SE = .10$, $N = 96$). There was no difference in how fair these three strategies were rated by participants in this sample. Controlled cocooning was rated as the least fair of all strategies ($M = 3.37$, $SE = .10$, $N = 89$) and rated significantly less fair than all other strategies apart from co-use, which only 53 participants selected as the most likely strategy for their parents to use ($M = 3.69$, $SE = .13$). Reasoned cocooning fell in the middle ($M = 3.79$, $SE = .08$) and was rated as significantly less fair than pre-arming and deference ($p < .05$). It is also worth pointing out here the option of 'none' was rarely chosen by participants, suggesting that the parental strategies explored here were relevant and relatable for this adolescent sample.

3.2.2 Parental Regulation and Social Media Use

So far social media use and parental regulation have been discussed separately, however, to help answer the research questions, it is necessary to describe the relationship between parental regulation strategies and social media use.

To this end, a mean frequency score was created by averaging participants' frequency of social media use on a weekday and weekend day. Scores could range from 0-5⁸ and the mean score for this sample was 2.9 ($SD = 1.36$); the closest label being *10-20 times* at the midpoint of the scale. The same process was repeated for duration of social media use. Scores could range from 0-6⁹ and the mean score was 2.5 ($SD = 1.37$); midway between *1-2 hours* and *3-4 hours*.

Following this, regression analyses were conducted to explore whether parental regulation strategies could predict any of the variance in frequency or duration of social media use. Two separate linear regressions were run, the first with frequency as the outcome variable, and a second predicting duration. There were two steps involved in this regression; the first involved entering the demographic variables of gender, school and year group and the second step involved entering the parenting strategy mean scores¹⁰.

⁷ As can be seen in Chart 2, this interaction is due to considerably lower fairness ratings for controlled cocooning in the empathy scenario.

⁸ A mean frequency score was created by averaging participants' frequency of social media use on a weekday and weekend day. Scores where participants answered 'don't know' were not included in the calculation ($N = 639$).

⁹ A mean duration score was created by averaging participants' duration of social media use on a weekday and weekend day. Again, scores where participants answered 'don't know' were not included in the calculation ($N = 656$).

¹⁰ Forward method was used to enter variables at both stages.

When predicting frequency of social media use, four variables were retained in the model: Gender ($R^2 = .023, p < .05$); Monitoring Score ($R^2 = .322, p < .001$); Deference Score ($R^2 = .183, p < .001$); and Pre-arming Score ($R^2 = .199, p < .05$). As would be expected from the correlations, both monitoring and pre-arming were 'negative predictors' of frequency of social media use (predicting 8.1% and 1.7% of variance in frequency, respectively). Deference accounted for 7.9% of variance in frequency of social media use.

When predicting duration of social media use, four variables were retained in the model: School ($R^2 = .059, p < .001$); Gender ($R^2 = .079, p < .05$); Reasoned Cocooning Score ($R^2 = .142, p < .001$); and Deference Score ($R^2 = .186, p < .001$). Reasoned cocooning was a negative predictor of duration of social media use, predicting 6.3% of the variance in duration. Deference accounted for 4.4% of the variance in duration of social media use.

Chart 1: Parental Strategy that Adolescents believed Parents were Most Likely to Adopt across the Three Scenarios

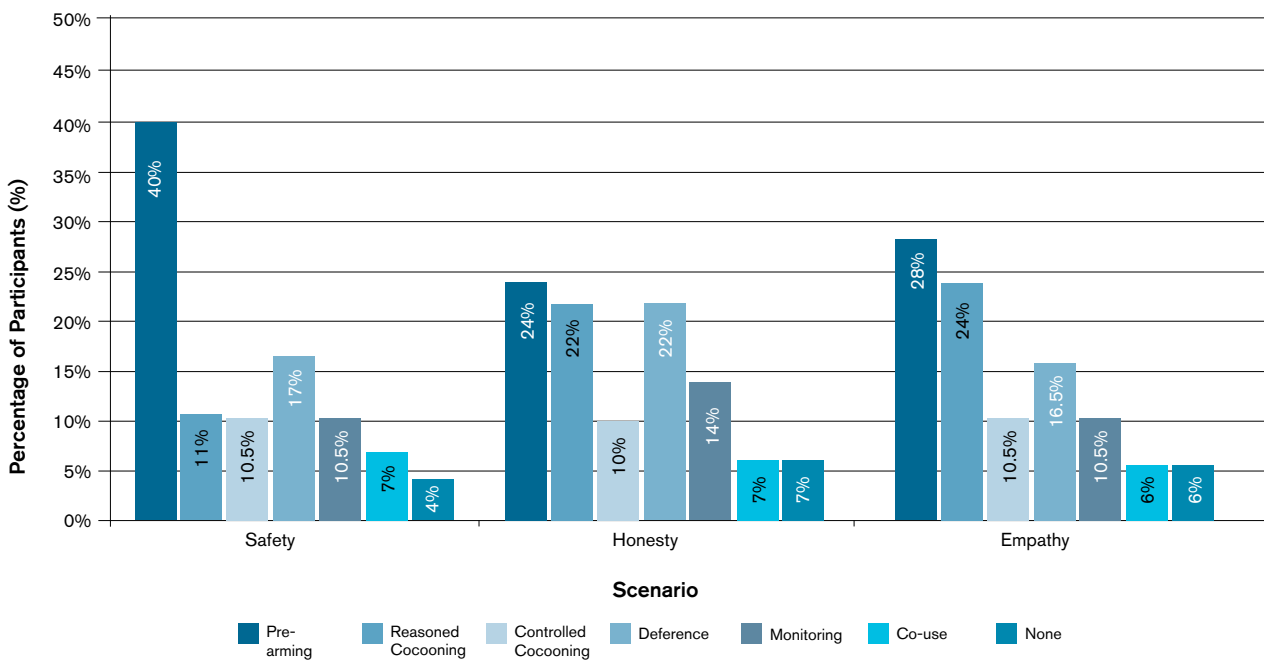
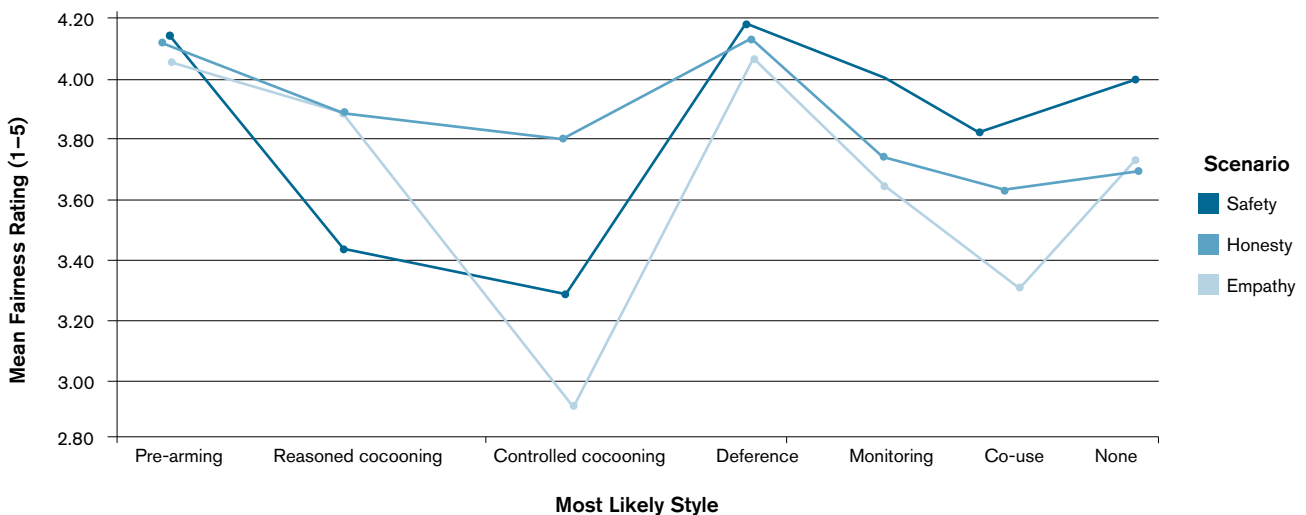
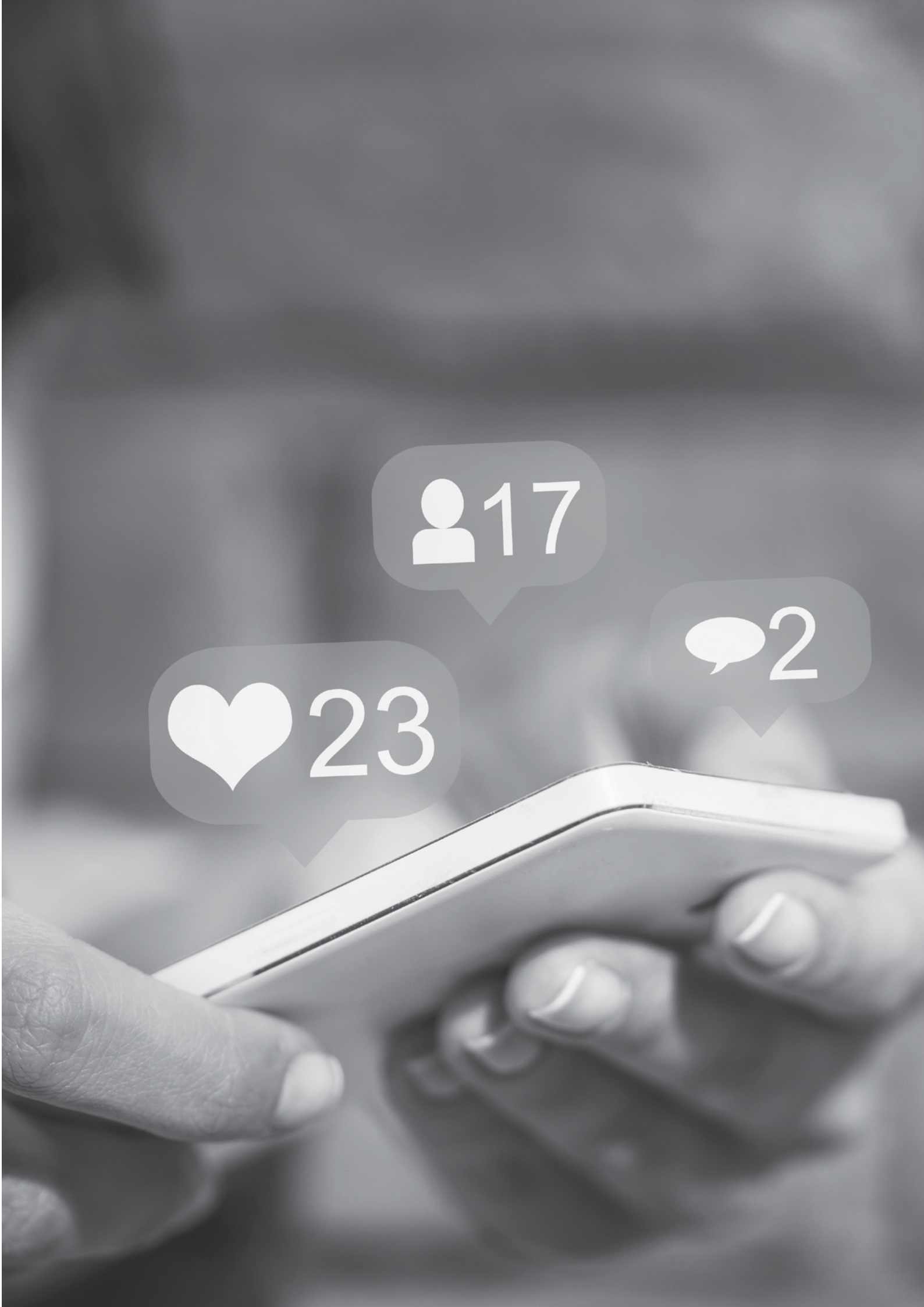


Chart 2: Mean Fairness Ratings Reported by Adolescents Across all Strategies and Scenarios.





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4 Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This research study explored adolescents' perceptions of parental regulation of social media use. Specifically, it examined adolescents' views about what kinds of regulation strategy their parent (or caregiver) is most likely to adopt and the perceived fairness of these techniques. The findings demonstrated that adolescents believed parents were most likely to use 'pre-arming' strategies, which, rather than imposing any interaction or technical restrictions, involve highlighting potential issues that might arise from adolescents' social media use and offering strategies to overcome these problems. In the case of honesty, for instance, parents might highlight the implications of being dishonest online or, when empathy is called into question, parents might signpost how the adolescents' posts could affect others.

Interestingly, participants reported that pre-arming was most likely to be used across all scenarios, not just those where online behaviours might conflict with moral values or beliefs. This could indicate that parents tend to apply anticipatory techniques to regulating social media use across different contexts, perhaps providing advice and guidance in advance of issues arising with the hopes that their child would subsequently know how to deal with prospective problems. At least in this study, there appeared to be some agreement with the proverb 'prevention is better than cure'.

Whilst pre-arming was associated with the highest likelihood scores across all scenarios, there did not seem to be a standard pattern in parental response for the remaining parental strategies. Rather, and in support of findings from Padilla-Walker (2006), strategy use seemed to be dependent on the particular context. For example, deference was rated as more likely in response to the safety scenario than the two moral scenarios. As the name suggests, deference refers to allowing children to make up their own minds; deferring to the child's own judgement or experience. This can be considered a more hands-off approach where the parent concedes that the child is well-placed to make their own decision and

trusts their judgement. The fact that this technique is less likely to be used in response to the two moral scenarios could indicate that such a hands-off approach is not deemed appropriate when significant moral values are involved. Indeed, Padilla-Walker and Thompson (2005) have previously demonstrated that parents use more controlling strategies in situations where important values are at stake. Similarly, Padilla-Walker (2006) demonstrated that deference is less likely to be used in response to value conflicts when this conflict occurs through the use of media.

The choice of parenting strategy might also differ depending on the gender of the child; female adolescents in this sample were less likely to report the use of deference, on the part of their parents, in comparison to male respondents; this was true of all three scenarios. This could indicate that a higher degree of control is involved in the regulation of daughters' social media use. Future research could examine this finding in more depth to understand the function of this control and whether this changes in relation to age or different moral contexts.

When comparing the moral and general scenarios, it did seem true that more 'controlling' parental strategies were used in the moral scenarios. For instance, controlled cocooning and monitoring were reported as more likely in response to the honesty scenario. This indicates that parents might invoke stricter regulation techniques when moral values are in question; a finding that could be considered to reflect the high degree of concern identified in UK parents around the influence of social media on young people's character and moral development (see Morgan, 2016).

When comparing across the two moral scenarios, however, different patterns were evident in adolescent responses, which might suggest that different kinds of parental response are expected depending on the type of virtue implicated or, alternatively, might reflect differences in how important these virtues are perceived to be. It is important to note that whether adolescents viewed

the empathy and honesty scenarios as being morally salient was not assessed in this study. It is therefore possible that adolescents did not recognise these social media scenarios as implicating moral values.

In terms of perceived fairness of parental regulation strategies, adolescents rated deference as the most fair, suggesting that they prefer minimal disruption to their social media use. This is probably not surprising to many and relates to previous research findings which suggest that children are more expert on the internet than parents (as agreed by both parents and children; Livingstone and Bober, 2006). In light of those findings, children's equation of 'fairness' with 'deference' might not need to be explained away as a self-serving bias but actually reflect the view that it is fair to let those with more knowledge of a given domain dictate the rules of that domain.

Interestingly, however, monitoring of social media use was deemed almost equally as fair as deference (with no statistically significant difference between the two strategies); this indicates that adolescents do expect and accept that parents might check online activity.

Previous research has demonstrated that parental involvement in adolescents' media activities can help to promote prosocial behaviours and can make adolescents and parents feel more connected (Coyne *et al.*, 2014; Coyne and Smith, 2014). Being able to monitor adolescents' social media use could therefore enhance family relationships and, through being able to identify any potential issues on social media, monitoring could also allow opportunities for pre-arming to take place and moral messages to be instilled. Given the aforementioned link between perceived fairness of parental strategies and acceptance of messages (Padilla-Walker and Carlo, 2004; Patrick and Gibbs, 2012), these regulation techniques might be particularly effective in ensuring that moral values and character strengths are taken across into the online world.

‘I THINK THAT THE INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS [ON SOCIAL MEDIA] MAY SEEM MORE ACCEPTABLE AND BE SEEN TO BE NORMAL.’

Parent

More controlling regulation strategies, however, were rated as significantly less fair by adolescents, with controlled cocooning being rated as the least fair of all strategies. This does not mean, of course, that more controlling regulation strategies are not appropriate or that they should not be adopted. Of importance here, however, is the finding that controlled cocooning was rated as significantly less fair than reasoned cocooning, regardless of both involving a restriction on adolescents’ social media use/access. The difference between these two strategies lies in the explanation that is offered to adolescents and therefore suggests that providing a morally or psychologically salient justification for restricting use/access to social media (i.e. in reasoned cocooning) means that adolescents are more likely to accept this strategy.

One key issue to address here is the accuracy of adolescents’ perceptions of parental regulation. The research and results described here have specifically focussed on adolescents’ perceptions rather than questioning parents about their regulation techniques. This leaves open the possibility that adolescents’ and parents’ perceptions could be dissimilar or even contradictory. Previous research, for instance, has highlighted how children and parents can hold disparate views on the de facto regulation of internet use and that children might not always be aware of regulation techniques, such as monitoring, being employed by parents (Livingstone and Bober, 2006). Whilst the design employed here has explored adolescent perceptions with a view to examining the degree of ‘fairness’ they are afforded, future research might expand on this by including a comparison of adolescents’ and parents’ responses. Responses could also be elicited about variables other than ‘fairness’ of regulation. For example, it is possible that even if adolescents regard some regulation strategy as ‘unfair’, they might acknowledge it as demonstrative of parents’ care and concern about their wellbeing.

Another potential misgiving is whether parenting regulation can tell you that much about adolescents’ use of social media. It could be suggested, for instance, that an examination of social media use and peer support or friendship might be more informative here, given that adolescence is marked by an emphasis on peer relationships. Davis (2013) demonstrates the important role of both peer and parental relationships when exploring how online communication can help adolescents achieve greater ‘self-concept clarity’. The results demonstrated that mothers had a positive impact on self-concept clarity and peer relationships in this online context (reports of high quality maternal relationships were positively related to both high self-concept clarity and friendship quality).

Within this research study, it has been demonstrated that parental strategies *are* able to predict some variance in the frequency and duration of social media use. In particular, deference was positively related to social media use and able to account for 7.9% of variance in frequency of use and 4.4% of variance in duration of use. This suggests, unsurprisingly, that deferring to adolescents’ judgements about behaviour and usage is associated with increased levels of social media use. Monitoring and reasoned cocooning were negatively related to social media use; monitoring could account for over 8% of the variance in number of checks/visits to social media sites and reasoned cocooning predicted 6.3% of the variance in the duration of social media use. This suggests that these active techniques where social media use is checked (in the case of monitoring) or restricted (in the case of reasoned cocooning) leads to lower levels of usage.

Conclusions

The results of this research study have illustrated the parental strategies that adolescents believe their parents would most commonly adopt in response to various social media scenarios. Overall, pre-arming was

reported as the most likely parental strategy across all scenarios which suggests that parents do take a proactive approach to social media use and try to anticipate possible problems or cases where moral values are put to the test. Pre-arming, deference and monitoring were the three regulation strategies that adolescents regarded as being the most ‘fair’, thus indicating that adolescents recognise that parental strategies such as monitoring usage and checking content are appropriate at times. Further to this, parental regulation predicted significant levels of variance in both frequency and duration of adolescents’ social media use, suggesting that parenting strategies can influence the extent to which adolescents use social media sites.

This research paper responds to parental concerns around the influence that social media has on young people’s character and moral development (Morgan, 2016). Whilst this study has not provided any definitive conclusions about the development of the ‘virtuous social media user’, some salient moral pointers have emerged along the way. For example, parents are purported to use more controlling strategies in response to morally salient scenarios which indicates that when moral issues arise online, parents prefer to take a more hands-on, rather than hands-off, approach. By weighing in when morally salient scenarios arise, parents should be able to help their child navigate this new moral terrain and begin to develop what has recently been dubbed *cyberphronesis* (Harrison, 2016). The research described here suggests that parents can play a crucial role in regulating adolescents’ social media use and in providing guidance and advice to help moral values and virtues translate over to the online world.

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Appendix

The social media scenarios, with regulation strategies, from Section 2 of the online questionnaire can be found below – note that the far right column was not made available to participants but is included here to aid understanding (for Scenario 3, please see Methodology):

Scenario 1: Your parent (or guardian) has just learned that a social media site, that you use regularly, has led to a huge increase in instances of bullying, both online and offline. Your parent is now concerned that this could affect you. Imagine that this has happened. How likely is it that your parent (or guardian) will do the following?

Remember, when answering these questions please think about the person who you said was your main caregiver.

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Not Sure	Likely	Extremely likely	Regulation type
A. Discuss the potential dangers with you to help you to be safe online						Pre-arming
B. Explain these dangers and ask that you don't go on this site anymore						Reasoned cocooning
C. Ask you what you think about these dangers						Deference
D. Start viewing the social media site activity with you						Co-use
E. Limit your time on that social media site after explaining why it's important that you do so						Controlled cocooning
F. Advise you on how to best avoid these dangers online						Monitoring
G. Stop you from going on that site anymore						Pre-arming
H. Start checking what you are doing on the social media site						Controlled cocooning
I. Restrict your time on that social media site						Co-use
J. Join the social media site so he/she can use it with you						Monitoring
K. Monitor your activity on the site						Reasoned cocooning
L. Leave you to continue as you were						Deference

Continued overleaf

Scenario 2: Your parent (or guardian) finds out that you have not been 100% truthful when posting content on a particular social media site. He/ She sees that, in your post, you have pretended to do something which you haven't really done. There are also other similar instances of dishonest posts. Imagine that this has happened. How likely is it that your parent (or guardian) will do the following?

Remember, when answering these questions please think about the person who you said was your main caregiver.

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Not Sure	Likely	Extremely likely	Regulation type
A. Explain why they are not happy about this and ask that you don't go on this site anymore						Pre-arming
B. Discuss with you the potential effects of being dishonest						Reasoned cocooning
C. Give you rules about using that site from now on						Deference
D. Start using the social media site with you						Co-use
E. Ask that you explain to him/her what you are doing on the site						Controlled cocooning
F. Ask for your opinion on being honest or dishonest online						Monitoring
G. Explain how this might have a negative impact on you and/or on other people that you talk to online						Pre-arming
H. Demonstrate how they would like you to behave on the site						Controlled cocooning
I. Supervise your activity on the site						Co-use
J. Limit the amount of time you are allowed on that social media site						Monitoring
K. Ask that you change your behaviour on this site after explaining why they would like you to do so						Reasoned cocooning
L. Think that you know best and leave you to it						Deference

For Scenario 3, please see Methodology Section.

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