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# Family satisfaction and social networking leisure

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the bidirectional relationship between the use of social networking sites (SNS) for leisure, and family and leisure satisfaction. The sociotechnological model served as a sensitising theoretical framework for this study. Seven families (22 individuals) took part in group and individual interviews. The data obtained from interviews were analysed using constant comparative method. The results showed that influences of SNS on satisfaction with family leisure and family satisfaction varied: the use of SNS helped families to build enjoyable family leisure, stay connected with family members and increase a sense of belonging. In some cases, however, it also decreased the amount of time spent with family, lowered attention during face-to-face interactions, provided opportunity for negative comparisons and caused concerns about the development of social skills among youth. In turn, family relationships and satisfaction with family life influenced the way family members used SNS for leisure. Some participants increased the use of SNS during times of family conflict in order to seek support and as a way to distract themselves from unpleasant thoughts. Others limited their use of SNS due to lack of interest in social pursuits and to avoid sharing information about family conflicts.

Social Networking Sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+, have changed the way we communicate and relate to social environment. These services offer users the opportunity to build a personal profile, as well as to connect and share content with others. In early 2015, Facebook had 1.44 billion monthly active users world-wide, with a yearly increase of 15% (Facebook Newsroom, 2015, March). Although current trends show that the number of adolescent who have Facebook accounts decline (Abbruzzese, 2014; January), in 2014, 73% of Americans ages 12–17 were users of this platform (Smith, 2014). Moreover, while youth leave Facebook, they often join the Facebook-owned photo-sharing app Instagram (Abbruzzese, 2014). According to recent reports, rapid technological development of smartphones and apps leads to a consistent increase in the amount of time people spend using information communication technology (ICT) (Perez, 2014, August), with social media being the most popular Internet activity (Adler, 2014, September).

This high SNS popularity is likely to affect family relations and family leisure. Family leisure is associated with family satisfaction and communication, as well as with the development of youth and

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the establishment of family memories and traditions (Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, & Poff, 2009; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2009). At the same time, however, the nature of family leisure can be contradictory and even negative (Trussell & Shaw, 2009). Considering the important role that leisure plays in family functioning and youth development, factors that lead to changes in quantity and quality of family leisure need to be examined. One such important factor is the use of ICT. However, despite multiple studies that have been conducted on ICT use (e.g. Carvalho, Francisco, & Relvas, 2015; Hertlein, 2012; Horst, 2010), it is still unclear how ICT, including SNS, influences family relationships and family leisure. Moreover, the majority of this research has been conducted outside of the leisure field (Carvalho et al., 2015; Hertlein, 2012) and explored ICT's impact on individuals rather than on the entire family. As Lanigan (2009) pointed out, 'There is a tremendous need for studies that examine the effects of technologies on family functioning, processes, communication, roles and relationships' (p. 595).

To address Lanigan's (2009) call and to add to our understanding of changes in leisure associated with fast-developing technology, the main goal of this study was to explore the bidirectional relationships between family leisure and family satisfaction, and the use of SNS technology for leisure. The specific objectives of this study were to: (a) explore how SNS use by family members influences family leisure and family satisfaction; (b) explore how SNS use by family members is influenced by family leisure and family satisfaction. The main focus of this study was on families with adolescents.

## Literature review

### *Family and ICT-based leisure*

ICT is defined as 'technologies people use to share, distribute, gather information and to communicate, through computers and computer networks' (Information Communication Technology, 2003, p. 3). Multiple studies explored the impact of ICT on families and their leisure. ICT was found to affect both structure and processes in family relationships (Hertlein, 2012). The structure of the family might be affected through technology use by redefining family boundaries, and by changing the rules and roles of individual family members (Carvalho et al., 2015; Hertlein, 2012). ICT may also impact the processes in the family by affecting how family members see intimacy, as well as how they initiate, form and maintain relationships. Moreover, ICT affects multiple areas of family life, including family cohesion, family functioning, family roles and boundaries, creating new interactions and relationship patterns (Carvalho et al., 2015).

When it comes to the quality of family relationships, the findings of previous studies revealed both positive and negative impacts of ICT. On the one hand, ICT was praised for providing an easy and fast way of communication between relatives separated by distance (Horst, 2010), ensuring more diverse social networks (Hampton, Sessions, Her, & Rainie, 2009), boosting intimacy among couples (Rabby & Walter, 2003) and serving as the only uniting experience between parents and children (Horst, 2010). On the other hand, ICT may lead to a decrease in time spent with family (Mesch, 2006), and to blurred boundaries between family and work, and family and the outside world (Chelsey, 2005). Other negative effects of ICT include cyberbullying and self-reported addiction to ICT (Watkins, 2009), disagreements on the rules of using technology (Huisman, Edwards, & Catapano, 2012) and parental distraction by technology during family meals and events (Radesky et al., 2014).

### *Family and SNS-based leisure*

Since different technology influences family relationships in different ways (Carvalho et al., 2015), this study will focus on SNS. SNS are defined as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211).

Due to SNS novelty, families only recently started to establish rules about technology use and define the role technology plays in their life (Huisman et al., 2012). Considering the popularity of SNS, many parents initiate a connection with children via SNS (Madden, Cortesi, Gasser, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012). Moreover, this technology is used for parenting purposes more often than other media such as messaging, Skype, chat rooms or blogging (Madden et al., 2012). By using SNS, parents extend their parental role to ensure the safety of their children in online spaces. They report talking to children about SNS profiles and privacy settings, and tracking information about their children available online (Madden et al., 2012). Parents also use SNS as an opportunity to interact with their children, their children's friends and other parents (Doty & Dworkin, 2014).

Parent–adolescent interactions via SNS are often similar to their offline interactions. For example, Burke, Adamic, and Marciniak (2013) found that mothers were more social, affectionate and supportive; and fathers shared factual information with their children. Moreover, parents treated their daughters more emotionally, while sons were encouraged to build up their independence. Parenting styles used on SNS depended not only on the gender of children but also on their age. Parents of younger adolescents were more protective (Madden et al., 2012), while parents of older youth were less likely to control their online behaviour (Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2008). Studies also showed that younger parents and those with college education were more likely to use SNS (Madden et al., 2012). Parents' attitudes towards technology also had an impact on the frequency and number of SNS activities (Jang & Dworkin, 2014).

Besides the use of SNS for parenting purposes, parents also found these resources to be helpful for establishing their new identity as parents, building social capital and exchanging social support (Jang & Dworkin, 2014; Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2013). Moreover, studies revealed that parents used SNS to obtain and confirm information related to parenting, including health and child development, lifestyle and religious information and typical parenting experiences (Dworkin, Connell, & Doty, 2013).

### Family satisfaction and leisure

Family satisfaction is a subjective and fluid concept dependent on changes in social norms, life stage of the family and individual development of family members. Family satisfaction was defined by Bowen (1988) as 'equitable reciprocal exchanges based on the ability of family members to jointly realize family-related values in behaviour' (p. 459). An inability to realize, follow or agree on those values among family members is likely to lead to dissatisfaction and frustration (Bowen, 1988).

Previous research showed that family leisure is associated with family and life satisfaction, family functioning and communication (Agate et al., 2009; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). According to studies based on The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), core and balance leisure activities are related to satisfaction with family life for parents and for the family as a whole. Children's satisfaction with family life is only associated with core leisure activities (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003).

Family leisure was found to be particularly important in families with children. According to Shaw (2008), many parents do not see leisure as simply 'having fun', but as a 'highly significant part of child-rearing through which children will be exposed to a range of positive developmental influences and will learn lessons important for their success in life' (p. 698). Through participation in purposive leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), parents attempt to achieve a broad range of developmental goals, including development of physical abilities (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008) and adoption of a healthy lifestyle (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Moreover, participation in physical activities (along with other leisure pursuits) provides children an opportunity to boost their self-confidence and self-esteem, meet friends and develop various life and social skills (Trussell & Shaw, 2007), including independence, self-reliance, responsibility, self-discipline and respect (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003). Other benefits of family leisure include an opportunity to pass on values and moral norms to children (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and to create memories of a happy childhood (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2009).

While family leisure has obvious benefits, it is important to recognize the problematic and contradictory nature of this concept. Multiple studies highlighted family leisure as 'occasions of shared leisure activity reproduced by women for other family members, at the expense of women's personal leisure' (Harrington, 2009, p. 52). Work associated with organising and facilitating family leisure, which is often performed by women, can be stressful and time consuming, and leaves little to no time and energy for women's personal leisure (Shaw, 2001). Moreover, while mothers are the ones to complete a lot of backstage work, it is the father's leisure choice that often becomes central for the entire family (Harrington, 2009). Another example of the contradictory nature of family leisure was noted in research on rural families. In a study by Trussell and Shaw (2009), women felt conflicted by the idyllic view of farm living challenged by parents' aspirations to prepare children for a non-farming lifestyle. Furthermore, planning family leisure in a remote country environment was associated with feelings of disappointment and frustration among mothers, due to the high demands of farm life and the frequent absence of fathers (Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Families of people with disabilities also reflected on the controversial nature of family leisure (Mactavish, MacKay, Iwasaki, & Betteridge, 2007). Being primary caregivers of children with disabilities, mothers discussed stress associated with planning and organising family vacations (Mactavish et al., 2007).

Keeping in mind both the benefits and stress associated with family leisure, it is important to understand how SNS use may influence and be influenced by family leisure and family satisfaction. As a relatively new technology, SNS creates an opportunity for disagreements and may lead to conflict in families (Huisman et al., 2012). It may also have an indirect negative impact on family satisfaction by decreasing the amount of time spent in family leisure (Mesch, 2006). Alternatively, SNS use may provide opportunities for families and family members to decrease stress associated with planning and organising family leisure. Since research on use of SNS in families and parent–child interactions via SNS is still in its infancy, the goal of this study is to explore the relationships between family leisure and family satisfaction and the use of SNS technology for leisure.
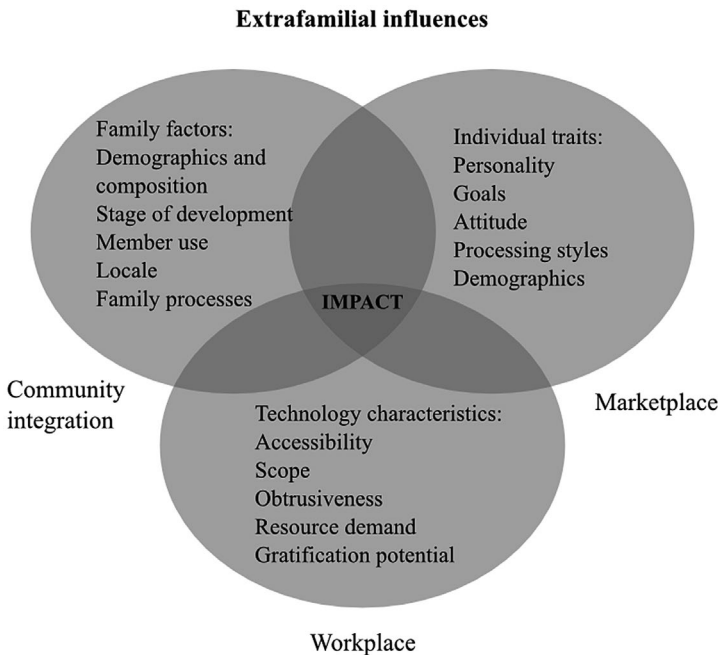


## Theoretical background

The *Sociotechnological Model* was employed as a sensitizing theoretical lens. Introduced by Lanigan (2009), this model represents an attempt to organise the existing knowledge about the complex

relationships between family life and technology. The model depicts interactions among four factors including individual traits of family members (personality, goals and needs, information processing style and attitudes towards technology), family factors (demographics and composition, stage of development, locale and family processes), technology characteristics (accessibility, functionality, obtrusiveness, resource demand and gratification potential) and extrafamilial influences (community integration of ICT, workplace and marketplace, as well as the intensity and direction of the ICT impact on family).

The model was built on the premises of Family System Theory and developmental theory, as well as on the ecological approach and bidirectional conceptualisation. Family Systems Theory posits that in a family, as in any system, all parts of the system are interconnected, and thus, in order to understand the family system, we have to study it as a whole (White & Klein, 2008). Both Family System Theory and the ecological approach claim that the family system and the environment are interconnected, or influence and are influenced by each other (Lanigan, 2009). The influences within family, as well as between family and the outside world, are bidirectional. Lastly, according to developmental theory, the development of individuals and life stages in family life have an impact on ICT use by families (Lanigan, 2009).

By employing the Sociotechnological Model (Lanigan, 2009), the following assumptions have been made: (a) a family is a complex system and all family members have to be evaluated in order to provide accurate representation of the processes; (b) a family does not exist in a vacuum and has to be evaluated with the assumption that multiple internal and external factors influence its functioning; (c) the family structure and stage in development have an impact on family–technology interaction; (d) different technologies vary in their functionality and thus focus should be on one particular technology; and (e) the relationship between family and technology is bidirectional.

## Methods

The study was based on the principles of social constructionism and interpretivism. From the perspective of social constructionism, reality is socially constructed through the interaction between people and their world (Crotty, 1998) by using a 'system of significant symbols' (p. 54), such as language and traditions. According to the interpretivists' approach, 'truth is not absolute but is decided by human judgment' (Bernard, 2000, p. 18). In other words, the concept or experience that might be meaningful for one individual or culture might be completely irrelevant for another individual or culture. This epistemology (social constructionism) and theoretical perspective (interpretivism) were chosen due to the novelty of the topic and lack of in-depth understanding of concepts associated with it. The choice of social constructionism and interpretivism affected the researchers' approach to data collection and data analysis. The use of semi-structured individual and family interviews allowed for families' shared construction of their use of SNS and family leisure, as well as for personal reflection on how these experiences affected their satisfaction with family life and leisure. Moreover, constant comparative method of data analysis allowed flexibility to generate themes meaningful for the participants.

The study was conducted in the fall and winter of 2011–2012 in a medium-size town (population of approximately 100,000) and a big city (population of approximately 3,000,000) in the Midwestern US. A purposive sampling technique was used to select families with adolescent children who use SNS on a regular basis (Bernard, 2000). The study was advertised through university and middle school list-serves and via Facebook. Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were conducted: 22 individual and 7 family interviews.

All families had two parents and more than one child. Children who participated in the study were between 13 and 17 years old. Except for two families who identified themselves as working-class, all participants were middle-class. Four families reported they were of Caucasian background, two were Latino, and one was interracial (South Asian – Caucasian). Each family received a $30 gift certificate for their participation.

Interviews lasted around 30 min, were conducted in English, and took place in the participant's residence or in the author's office. After a semi-structured family interview, each family member participating in the study took part in a semi-structured individual interview. Questions asked during family interviews focused on family leisure patterns, the use of SNS in the family and the influence of SNS on family leisure and family relationships. During the individual interviews, participants were asked about their individual SNS use, about their family satisfaction and satisfaction with family leisure.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with the use of pseudonyms. The data were analysed through constant comparative method by using initial, focused, axial and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). During the initial coding stage, the initial codes were created as a result of a fresh review of data with an incident-to-incident approach. These codes included, among others, building enjoyable family leisure, staying in touch with family members and decreased time spent on family interactions. Focused coding involved sifting through the data to develop most significant and vivid categories. In this stage, codes developed earlier were evaluated for their adequacy and analytic sense. During the axial coding stage, the categories and subcategories, as well as links between them were further defined. Theoretical coding involved conceptualising existing categories and relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006). The data analysis began after the first interview was conducted and lasted until agreement about themes was reached by both authors.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study the authors followed Charmaz's (2006) four criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The researchers developed expertise in the area of the study, discussed results with an independent researcher in the field and conducted member checks with participants.

## Results

Following the objectives of the study, the data were analysed to explore how SNS use influenced family leisure and family satisfaction, as well as how family relationships influenced the way family members used SNS.

### *The influences of SNS use on family leisure and family satisfaction*

#### *Building enjoyable family leisure*

Many participants reported SNS use improved their family leisure by helping them obtain new ideas for family recreation, spark a conversation and develop shared interests. Looking at pictures of family leisure of other people provided the participants with ideas for their own free time activities. For example, Ashley (mother) gave examples of how SNS facilitated her vacation planning.

> We were looking for a vacation home to use with my cousins and one of my friends has posted a place that they have stayed with their extended family and I was able to check out that website and that home.

Other parents also borrowed ideas about places they would like to visit with their family, such as museums and late night ice-skating.

Many participants also indicated that sharing pictures or information they saw on Facebook could start a conversation with family members. It often included sharing information about relatives and friends, or about entertaining leisure engagements. Moreover, in some families, SNS and other technologies were the only shared interest that helped family members to connect and spend time together. For example, Izabell (adolescent daughter) commented, 'Well, I don't think I can really interact with my dad any other way 'cause I don't really know what he likes doing besides electronic things'.

Lastly, families used SNS as a utilitarian tool to help plan and organize family-related events, including birthday parties, sleepovers and family reunions. As Emily (mother) described, 'For my son's birthday this year, things were very busy, so he organised a ping-pong party and he did it strictly through Facebook'. In some cases, parents utilised Facebook for simple every-day purposes such as planning children's pick-up time.

### Staying in touch with family members and increasing sense of belonging

SNS also provided families with opportunity to stay in touch with relatives and friends who lived in different areas of the country or abroad. Emily (mother) described,

> It helps me keep me in touch with our relative in Turkey. When she came here last [time] we traveled together and she is a big picture taker and so she put pictures up. And also she'd take pictures of her son and she'll put things there. So, it does affect our ability to communicate and stay in touch.

Women were often the ones who maintained the connection not only with their own families but also with their husbands' relatives. Interestingly, while some husbands did not use SNS and had rather negative attitude towards technology, they appreciated their wives' initiative to connect with their families. It is also important to note that while most of the children took the ability to connect with friends for granted, their parents felt quite excited about this opportunity provided by SNS.

Staying in touch with distant family members and friends helped some participants (especially women) build a sense of belonging and appreciation for family in their lives. Looking at pictures of their extended family, as well as pictures of their friends who had families made them feel that being a part of the family was a positive experience, which increased their family satisfaction. As Melisa (mother) explained,

> I think it [SNS use] may affect it [family satisfaction] positively in a sense that I see other families, especially during holiday time, posting pictures of everyone smiling, they [are] all together and I think 'I'm part of this, I also have a family, I also have very loving comfortable home, so it's a good life.'

Such a sense of connection to others built with the use of SNS was reciprocal, as Sandra (mother) discovered, 'Well, and people…they are my friends but I don't realize it. We went to a funeral and about five people came up and said "Oh my gosh, I just love your Facebook postings, they are so funny!"'

Use of SNS allowed participants to enhance their sense of belonging to their extended families, as well as to the larger community of people who have families. Moreover, SNS use helped to them realize the importance of families in their lives. Such appreciation for their own family might be associated with a shared construction of family and family leisure as positive concepts via SNS use. The increased level of interaction and support provided by extended family members could also lead to improved family satisfaction. Lastly, shared family values within a larger group of people who have families could reassure participants in their own views on the importance of family.

### Decreased time spent on family interactions

While SNS were used by families to stay in touch with distant relatives and friends, they also distracted them from spending time together in person. For example, Izabell (adolescent daughter) described her mother's concern about her excessive screen time:

> My mom complains about me not spending time with my family 'cause I do Facebook and hang out with friends a lot. […] I do spend more time with them afterwards 'cause sometimes I'm a little bit hesitant too, 'cause I don't really like to be forced to have fun with people 'cause then it's not much fun at all. I can relate with my friends more so I like spending time with them too. But, yeah, I think Facebook kind of interferes with that [time together as a family].

Izabell's mother reported that she tried to invite her daughter to spend time with the relatives but Izabell kept returning to her room to use the computer.

Not only children were at fault for choosing SNS over family time. Answering the question on whether he thought the use of Facebook by his mother influenced how much time they spent together as a family, Steven (adolescent son) said, 'Yeah, because she [the mother] is on it constantly. She said every 10 min but it's like every 5, maybe 2 min'. It is important to recognize, however, that despite a decrease in family time due to SNS use in some families, a number of the interviewees (both parents and children) did not see it as a big problem that could significantly affect their family satisfaction. They justified it by the fact that the time spent on SNS use was reasonable, that SNS offered opportunities for relaxation and social interaction, and that such social interactions fulfilled developmental needs of adolescents.

### Decreased quality of family interactions

The quality of family leisure was also affected by SNS use due to the lack of attention during face-to-face interactions. Interestingly, despite a general stereotype that youth get distracted by technology, in this study they were the ones to report lack of attention on the part of their parents. For example, Kyle (adolescent son) said,

> She [mother] is usually on the computer doing Facebook or something else. So, sometimes [it] doesn't really seem like she is listening. Like last night we were talking about school and it didn't seem like she was listening so … Seems like … she is on it [Facebook] pretty often and I think she could take a few moments just to listen.

Another adolescent participant (Dennis) reported a very similar experience, 'I think mostly at night, when I want to tell her something, she gets on Facebook at night and she is so into it, like I can't talk to her'. While both Dennis and Kyle stated that their relationships with their mothers were not influenced by their SNS use, their responses were indicative of some discomfort with the situation.

### Opportunity for negative comparisons

Another reason for a decrease in participants' family satisfaction was related to a change in the perception of family time. After comparing their own leisure to that of their 'friends' on Facebook, some participants reported dissatisfaction with their leisure experiences. For example, Dennis (adolescent son) said, 'Usually when I'm on Facebook I'm depressed. I'm looking at everything that people are doing and I'm like "damn! I'm not doing much right now"'. Similar sentiments were shared by Kathrine (mother):

> I know the family from the church and they always go to activities for the older one. He is having football games and everybody is with him and they post pictures and they are sharing pictures when they go to camp. But the husband looks like he loves to go.

Katherine later mentioned that due to personality and health issues her husband was never particularly interested in travelling and active leisure, and thus, she often spent leisure time with her children only.

### Damaging role of SNS for youth development

Considering that for many families with children, family leisure plays important purposive role (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), some families expressed concern about the influence of SNS on the development of youth, particularly their communication skills. For example, Melisa (mother) commented on the fact that her husband and children were at times more comfortable with online than face-to-face interactions:

> I might have to drag people from their computers at times. […] The parameters of interacting through social network site are much more limited than the parameters of interacting with a person face-to-face. And I think the less you interact with people face-to-face you lose those skills that are essential. I mean you can always turn off your computer – 'I don't wanna talk to you right now' but you can't do it to a person in front of you.

Although some parents saw SNS as a potential obstacle to their children's development, most of the parents also admitted that they understood importance of SNS in young people's lives. For example, Emily (mother), discussed the rules of SNS use:

> [My son] has some restrictions on overall screen time during the week 'cause, you know, he has to concentrate on studies but we have not disallowed Facebook because we realize it's important way for kids to keep connected socially. So, he is not supposed to spend tons of time on it but we know it's important for him to check in with everybody.

### The influences of family satisfaction on SNS use

The relationship between SNS use and family satisfaction was bidirectional. Although a few of the participants reported that their family satisfaction and the SNS use were not related, there were many others who claimed to change SNS use pattern during times of family conflict. Participants who reported a decrease in their use of Facebook while having disagreements with family members

explained that they were trying to avoid sharing negative feelings about their family or did not have a desire to be social. As Steven (adolescent son) said, 'If I'm upset with someone I don't use Facebook 'cause I don't wanna put something on there that I would regret later'. Another participant, Dennis (adolescent son) reflected on his pattern of using SNS during family conflict: 'I think I would use it less. I shut down when I'm depressed, I just get away from everything. I don't wanna people say like "oohh, emo".'

There were also participants who reported an increase in SNS use during difficult periods in family life. They used SNS to distract themselves and to receive social support. For example, Oliver (father) described his son's Facebook use: 'My son might [use Facebook more while upset over family matters]. I've seen him getting mad and going on Facebook'. Some adolescents reported chatting with their close friends through personal chat about the conflict, while others reported using SNS to distract themselves from negative emotions. For instance, a teenage daughter, Izabell, described,

> If I'm mad at them [parents] then I will be mad on Facebook too. […] I don't think I would [post public comments], otherwise my dad would start commenting on that and it would be kind of embarrassing. I usually chat with my friends on Facebook about it and text and stuff. I don't put it as public or otherwise my parents would see it. […] It makes me feel better.

Anita, another adolescent, reported using Facebook as a distraction during family conflict: 'Sometimes, if there is dispute or one of us would be angry that could possibly lead me to use it [Facebook] just to distract myself from that and to get my mind away from any arguments'.

The relationship between family satisfaction, satisfaction with family leisure and SNS use by family members was bidirectional: while participants described the way in which SNS use influenced their family satisfaction and satisfaction with family leisure; they also provided examples of how their relationships in family influenced their use of SNS.

## Discussion and conclusions

The findings showed that SNS use may influence satisfaction with family leisure and family satisfaction in different ways. In some cases, participants reported that SNS helped them build enjoyable family leisure, family community and family satisfaction. In other instances, however, interviewees revealed that SNS use decreased their satisfaction with family leisure and negatively affected youth development. Many family members also reported that their relationship with each other either increased or decreased their SNS use. It is important to acknowledge that, unlike some previous literature would suggest (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Watkins, 2009), none of the family members found SNS to be seriously detrimental to their lives or to their family satisfaction. All of them also believed that shared leisure was an important part of what it meant to be a family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

Those participants who believed SNS use affected their family leisure and family satisfaction reported that it provided ideas for recreation, served as a conversation starter, helped build shared interests and played utilitarian role in planning family events. While the fact that technology can help develop shared interests was mentioned by Horst (2010), other ways in which SNS improved family leisure were not discussed before. These findings have important research and practical implications considering that differences in developmental stages and abilities among family members make family leisure difficult to organize. Our findings show that technology that has been often considered a negative factor in family life (Chelsey, 2005; Watkins, 2009), may in fact play important roles in fostering family leisure. While many leisure providers are concerned about technology 'competing' with traditional leisure engagements, perhaps we should accept that 'the Age of E-Leisure' has come (Caldwell, 2013, p. 28) and focus our efforts on learning how technological developments could be used to improve family leisure. Leisure professionals can consider ideas for using SNS as a tool that brings family together, such as searching for ideas and things to do, sharing photos of family activities and learning new tips on how to use technology to make family leisure more enjoyable.

Participants in our study also reported that SNS increased family satisfaction by allowing them to stay in touch with extended family members and friends, and developing a sense of community.

Previous studies discussed the benefits of SNS as a tool that helps to establish connections between family members separated by distance (Horst, 2010). However, the role of SNS in building a sense of community and thus increasing family satisfaction is a novel finding. While online communities often develop based on shared leisure interests and help family members establish social connections (Parry et al., 2013), the participants of this study were not referring to a particular cyber space or online group based on their hobby preferences. Rather, they were associating themselves with the concept of a family. At a time when the perception of family is drastically changing, technology seems to help some individuals maintain their family values and, as a result, their family satisfaction. It is possible that after many years of protecting their privacy encouraged by an individualistic society, families need a tool to help them satisfy their natural need for connectedness. Interconnectivity provided by E-leisure (Nimrod & Adoni, 2013) might be just what individuals in our society need to develop a sense of belonging to their own nuclear or extended family, or even to a larger community that shares the same family values.

Moreover, considering that family leisure may have a constraining, stressful and contradictory connotation for some family members (Harrington, 2009; Shaw, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2009), technology might be used to provide opportunities to organize and facilitate individual leisure in cases when caregiving or other responsibilities do not allow for participation in more structured leisure activities. For example, in a study by Parry et al. (2013), the use of SNS by mothers 'facilitated momances (deep platonic friendships among mothers)', as well as provided sense of community, connectedness and care. Similarly, SNS could facilitate providing and planning for both individual and family leisure in remote country settings (Trussell & Shaw, 2007, 2009).

While many of the findings showed positive effects of SNS on family leisure, in some cases, spending time on SNS also lowered satisfaction with family leisure due to decreased amount of time spent interacting with each other (Mesch, 2006), lack of attention during face-to-face interactions (Radesky et al., 2014; Turkle, 2011), and opportunity for negative comparison with the family leisure of others. The change in interpersonal interactions was discussed by Turkle (2011), who introduced the concepts of 'alone together' and 'presence in absence and absence in presence'. Such experiences can now be considered almost a norm even during traditional social events, such as shared meals and parties when, instead of interacting with friends and family members, people focus their attention on their smart phones. This 'absence in presence' may affect the relationships with significant others, as well as the quality of leisure in general. Considering the benefits of shared family leisure where family members interact with each other instead of simply sharing space (Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009), it would be important to explore how the 'alone together' approach to family leisure will change our satisfaction with family life.

Lastly, one of the biggest concerns raised by the participants was the impact of SNS on the development of youth, in particular their social skills (Watkins, 2009). While technology is often perceived as an educational tool, recent studies found that youth who use technology on a regular basis are less able to read the emotions of other people (Uhls et al., 2014). Their ability to initiate a conversation or solve problems in person was also brought into question (Small & Vorgan, 2008). Considering this, further research is needed on how technology-mediated leisure affects various aspects of youth development.

Following the assumption of bidirectionality proposed by the Sociotechnological Model (Lanigan, 2009), this study also examined how family relationships and family satisfaction influenced SNS use by family members. Interviewees who reported reducing their SNS use during conflict tried to avoid publicising family problems or sharing personal emotions, or just did not have a desire to engage in social interactions. It would be important to explore why some people report feeling a sense of community as a result of SNS use, while others feel the need to distance themselves from technology. It is possible that the desire for technology use, similar to non-technology mediated social interactions, is situational, or that it depends on people's personalities.

Some of the participants, who claimed to increase SNS use during family disagreements, used SNS for distraction or to seek support from close friends. Similarly, in Mesch's (2006) study children in families with a higher level of intergenerational conflict often used Internet for social communication

and support. Moreover, technology was found to provide social support to new mothers and to those who struggle with depression (Parry et al., 2013). However, to our knowledge, social support through technology-based leisure was not explored in the context of family. Since leisure traditionally has been used to seek social support and as an opportunity to escape reality, we could argue that SNS is just a tool used to meet traditional purposes of leisure. However, technology-based leisure may provide people with an entirely different level of support and escape due to its synchronicity, interactivity, anonymity and immersion in virtual reality (Nimrod & Adoni, 2013). Available at any time and requiring little to no investment in the form of money and emotional engagement, social support and opportunity to escape offered by SNS provide immediate gratitude. Creating an illusion of interacting with ideal partners, SNS may lead to unrealistic expectations towards real family members and may cause avoidance of solving problems in their relationships.

While the findings of this study support the results of some previous research and introduce several new areas of inquiry related to the relationship between family functioning and technology, they could also be used to expand the Sociotechnological Model (Lanigan, 2009). In particular, we propose that the ways in which technology (specifically SNS) may influence and be influenced by individual family members and family overall should be added to the section on Impact. This section represents inter-play of multiple factors grouped into three categories: individual traits, family factors and technology characteristics. The impact may be presented by improved family leisure, family community and family satisfaction, decreased satisfaction with family leisure and potential damage to youth development. Although extrafamilial influences (Lanigan, 2009) were not the main focus of this study, it would be reasonable to assume that technology can facilitate the exchange of ideas between family members and their environment. However, since the results of this study are mostly exploratory, further research is needed before changes to the Sociotechnological Model are made.

This study had several limitations. First, brief interaction time with the participants limited our ability to gain a deep understanding of their use of SNS and family leisure. It might have also limited participants' desire to discuss such sensitive topic as family satisfaction. Second, due to a rather homo-geneous sample, the experiences discussed in this study may not reflect the reality of more diverse families. Third, family interviews have some inherent limitations, especially when conducted with groups of people of different levels of power (children and parents) (Bernard, 2000). To address this, each family member participated in individual interview.

Future research should explore additional ways in which family, technology and leisure intersect. It would also be helpful to understand how to harness positive influences of SNS on family leisure and family satisfaction, as well as how to mitigate potential negative impacts of technology on family life. Further research on how people's relationships with each other influence their SNS use could provide valuable information on technology-based coping strategies. Lastly, we recommend exploring differ-ences and similarities in the perceptions of modern technology by families of different demographic backgrounds and structures.

## Disclosure statement

## Notes on contributors

*Stodolska's* research focuses on leisure behaviour of ethnic and racial minorities and on constraints on leisure. She explores subjects such as the effects of race and ethnicity on leisure behaviour of recent immigrants, the adaptation processes among minority groups, and transnationalism. Other subjects that are prominent in her research include ethnic and racial discrimination in leisure settings, physical activity among minority populations, as well as constraints on leisure.

*Sharaievska's* research focuses on use of new technologies in recreation management (e.g., the new media/social network sites, gaming, cell phones and navigational devices) and technology-based leisure in contemporary families. Among her other research interests are leisure behaviour among diverse groups of population and leisure in diverse families.

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