

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Social Media on Family Values and the Development of Emirati Adolescents: Evidence from Emirati Families

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ARTICLE INFO

Published on 12th of June 2026.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54878/yms3yt55>

KEYWORDS:

Artificial Intelligence, Social Media

HOW TO CITE:

ABOUKHOUSA, H. (2026). The Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Social Media on Family Values and the Development of Emirati Adolescents: Evidence from Emirati Families. Proceedings of the 3rd International Dialogue of Civilizations & Tolerance Conference (IDCT 2026). Emirates Scholar Center for Research & Studies, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
<https://doi.org/10.54878/yms3yt55>



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ABSTRACT

The Emirati family is slowly but surely losing a room they never knew they were in. As the infrastructure of adolescent attention is revolutionized by artificial intelligence, social media platforms are taking the place of the family as the primary arena where values are to be generated and nurtured. And yet, this is a society of great technological and scientific leadership and immense cultural roots. The country is at a crossroads, and it is a moment unparalleled in history and, quite simply, with no roadmaps to guide it. The study presented here thus explores this pivotal moment through the eyes and experiences of 46 Emirati families who are currently at the forefront of this challenge as they attempt to come to terms with the changes brought about by this incredible revolution.

Using a structured field survey conducted with Emirati households containing adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years; the full span of adolescence as defined by UNESCO¹; and situated within the UAE's National AI Strategy 2031 and the Year of the Family 2026, the paper examines three core issues: how Emirati families perceive the intellectual and cultural risks emanating from social media toward their adolescent children; how artificial intelligence may serve as a protective and pedagogical tool for adolescent development; and within what types of human-centered, culturally sensitive structures the integration of family and technology may be rendered legitimate and effective.²

While 67.4% of Emirati families with adolescents reported providing continuous intellectual guidance and support, the data simultaneously reveals that 56.5% of adolescents spend four to over six hours daily on social media platforms, with 26.1% exceeding six hours of usage every single day.³ In essence, the intellectual efforts of families are being structurally offset by the volume and velocity of digital exposure. Social media and peer networks have overtaken the family as the

dominant force shaping the intellectual and value formation of adolescents.^{3,4} The gap this study identifies is therefore not merely one of parental effort versus adolescent habit; it is a structural asymmetry between a family operating at human scale and platforms operating at algorithmic scale.