

Exploring the Ways US High School Students with ASD are using Social Media

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Purpose

While the primary focus of educators is on increasing academic achievement, high school students with autism are also concerned with the social aspects of their school days such as entering peer groups, making friends, and developing intimate relationships. These non-academic skills may go unaddressed or overlooked by school staff. Within the social environment of high school, difficulties in the areas of communication and social interaction can put students with autism at risk for social isolation and bullying. Positive peer relationships have been found to facilitate positive social and academic outcomes. Social media, so commonly used by the majority of teens to navigate the social world, has been rarely examined in the lives of teens with autism.

Research Questions

- 1) What social media are high school students with autism using?
- 2) What do they perceive are its benefits?

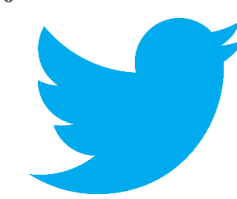
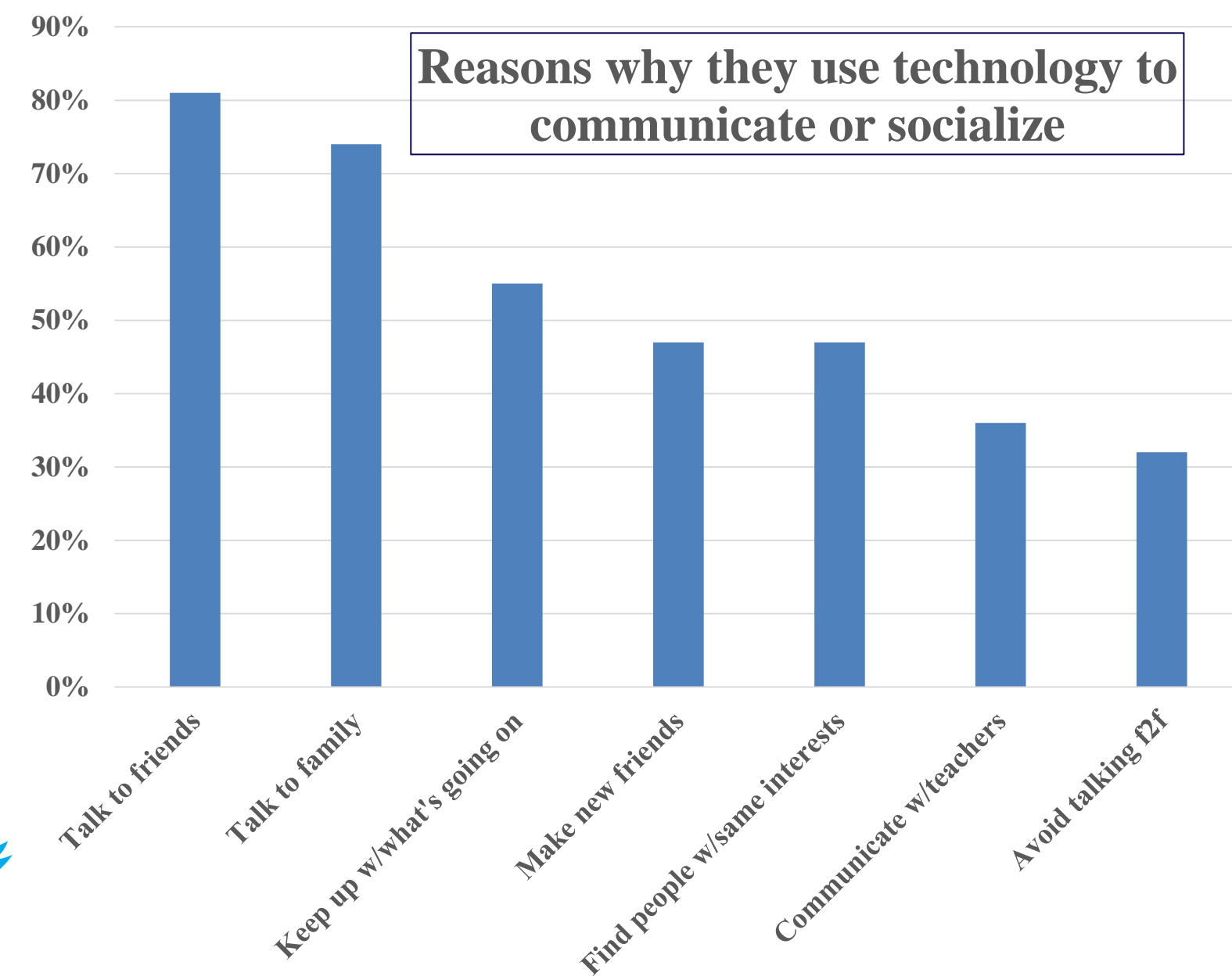
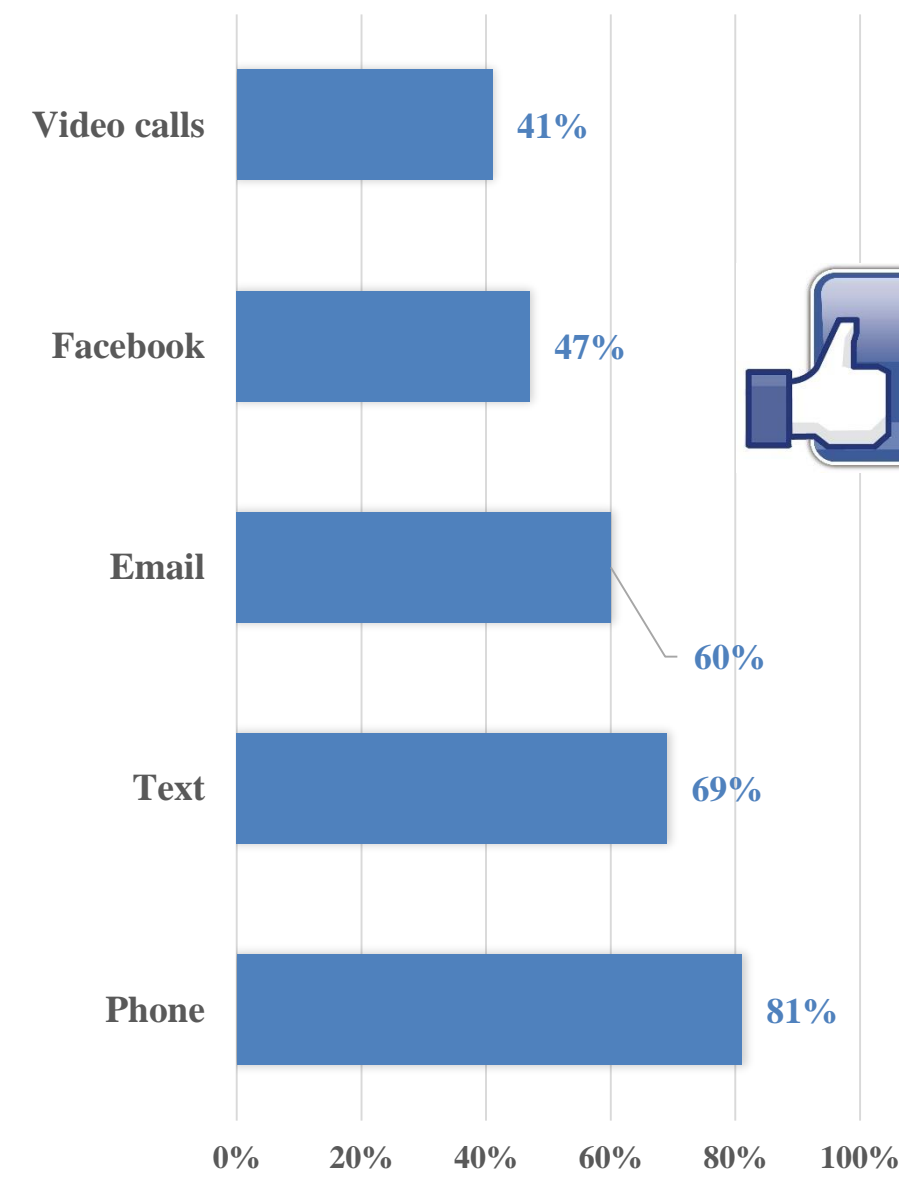
Methods

- Paper surveys of 472 high school students with autism in California, North Carolina, Wisconsin
- Email interviews of 10 survey respondents

Characteristics	Survey N=472	Interviews N=10
Gender Male	87%	80%
Age	mean=16.8 SD 1.4 range 14-22	mean=16 range 15-18
Race White	67% (Hispanic 21%)	70% (Hispanic 10%)
Income >\$99k	48%	20%
IQ >70	77%	90%
Standard Diploma Track	60%	90%

Student Survey Results

92% use technology to communicate/socialize



Social media they are using:
Facebook Instagram Tumblr Steam
Google+ WhatsApp Snapchat
Twitter Kik Vine



74% bring cell phones to school

66% like having their phone at school so they can contact a parent

Interview Results

Themes

1. Bridging Distance

"We both can't drive and live about 4 miles apart and can only see each other at school. So we can keep in touch during the weekend and holidays."



"I can communicate with the world. Social media can introduce a person to more types of people, culturally, than maybe they could meet in their local community."

2. Variety of options that help facilitate participation

"I use my phone to FaceTime so then I can see the other person's face."



"My social life is on youtube when I post videos and on instagram i [sic] love like talking to my friends on there and when im [sic] messaging people about something then im [sic] very social. I have some friends who are video friends, we just talk about games and YouTube."

Conclusion

Our study showed that many adolescents with autism are using a wide variety of social media to increase their social interactions. This study's finding regarding adolescents' access to and use of social media have implications for educators and families support of social skill development.

Researchers should investigate the impact of social media use on:

- feelings of social connectedness
- reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression

