

# **A Study on the Formation Mechanism and Influencing Factors of "Limited Disconnection" among the Youth Group**

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of digitalization's pervasive influence and rapid social transformation, the phenomenon of youth "cutting ties with relatives" has evolved from an individual behavior into a widespread social trend. This study adopts a dual perspective of digital technology and family transformation, integrating literature review and empirical research to systematically analyze the practical characteristics, formation mechanisms, and influencing factors of youth severing familial connections. Findings indicate that the longer young people spend on online socializing, the more pronounced the intergenerational digital divide and the stronger the sense of online relationship substitution, the more pronounced their tendency to sever ties. Core family degree, intergenerational value conflicts, insufficient emotional feedback, and weakened family moral education also significantly exacerbate the alienation between young people and their relatives. Further analysis reveals a distinct interaction between digital technology and family transformation, jointly driving youth toward "limited severance of ties".

**Keywords:** Youth Disengagement from Family; Digital Technology; Formation Mechanism; Influencing Factors

## **1. Introduction**

With the in-depth advancement of modernization, urbanization and digitalization in Chinese society, the traditional kinship relations based on blood ties and geographical proximity are undergoing profound changes. The past model of visiting relatives characterized by "family-oriented" and "obligatory exchanges" is gradually being replaced by the attitude of "unwilling to visit, not wanting to visit, and too lazy to visit" among the younger generation [1]. Topics such as "cutting off family ties", "not

visiting relatives", and "avoiding relatives during the Spring Festival" frequently top social media hot searches, reflecting the common mindset of the younger generation in kinship interactions. From a social structure perspective, the miniaturization of families, the normalization of population mobility, and the acceleration of life rhythms have continuously widened the physical and psychological distances between relatives [2]. From a cultural perspective, the individual consciousness of young people is constantly strengthening, and they increasingly value personal boundaries, quality of life, and emotional comfort, no longer viewing kinship as an obligatory bond [3]. At the same time, digital technology has fully permeated daily life, with online socializing, interest-based communities, and virtual companionship constantly encroaching on the space for real kinship interactions [4,5]. Against this backdrop, the phenomenon of "cutting off family ties" among the youth is no longer an isolated incident but rather reflects the overall transformation of family structure, intergenerational relationships, social interaction patterns, and value systems. Therefore, systematically answering questions such as "Why do young people cut off family ties?", "What factors influence this phenomenon?", and "How to build healthy modern kinship relations?" holds significant theoretical value and practical significance. The current research on youth disconnection from their relatives mainly focuses on three directions. First, from the perspective of social structure, scholars such as Zhu Boyu and Zhao Liuyang hold that urbanization, population mobility, and the nuclearization of families are the macro backgrounds for the emergence of disconnection from relatives. The weakening of the functions of traditional extended families has led to the loss of a realistic basis for kinship exchanges [1,2]. Second, from the perspective of digital media, scholars like Xie Longying, Yan Daocheng, and Xu Ping point out that short

videos, social software, and online communities have changed the way young people interact. Online relationships have replaced offline family ties, and the digital divide has exacerbated generational estrangement [3,5,6]. Third, from the perspective of family and emotion, researchers such as Zhao Sen, Yan Tongjing, and Guo Zenghua have focused on the impact of intergenerational concept conflicts, mismatched emotional supply and demand, and changes in family moral education on kinship. They believe that the essence of youth disconnection from relatives is an emotional choice and relationship reconstruction [3,7,8]. Liu Xinyi further proposed the concept of "mediated symbiosis" from the perspective of media practice, revealing the dual role of digital technology in kinship [9]. Mao Yifeng summarized the phenomenon of disconnection from relatives from multiple perspectives and proposed solutions [10], while Jin Yujun put forward guiding strategies based on the construction of family education and family traditions [11]. Tang Lianzi expanded the research boundary from the perspective of the shift in the choice of intimate relationships [12]. Despite the richness of existing research, there are still obvious deficiencies: most studies are mainly theoretical analyses and lack large-sample empirical support; few incorporate digital technology and family changes into a unified framework; explanations of the influencing mechanisms are not deep enough, and the countermeasures proposed are rather general. Based on this, this paper, grounded in empirical investigation, systematically integrates dual influencing factors to form a more complete explanatory framework.

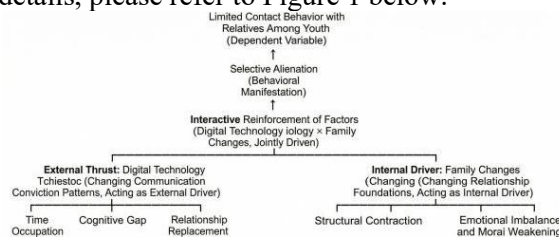
This study aims to, based on empirical survey data, explain the real characteristics of youth disconnection from their relatives, explore its formation mechanism and influencing factors, and provide referenceable solutions for alleviating this current real problem. Based on the research conclusions, it will propose targeted and operational relief paths, presenting a complete research chain of "phenomenon description - mechanism analysis - empirical verification - countermeasure proposal".

## 2. Research Design and Data Sources

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

The theoretical framework of this study is as

follows: Digital technology alters communication methods, and family changes alter the basis of relationships. Both jointly shape the limited disengagement behavior of young people. Digital technology exerts an external push force through time occupation, cognitive barriers, and relationship substitution; family changes exert an internal driving force through structural contraction, intergenerational conflicts, emotional imbalance, and moral weakening. The two types of factors interact and reinforce each other, jointly pushing young people towards selective disengagement. For details, please refer to Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Construction Diagram**

Based on the above, the research hypotheses of this paper are as follows:

H1: The higher the degree of digital technology usage, the more significant the tendency of young people to cut off family ties.

H2: The greater the intergenerational digital divide, the stronger the degree of family disconnection among young people.

H3: The core family structure, intergenerational conflicts, insufficient emotional feedback, and weakened family affection education significantly increase the possibility of family disconnection.

H4: There is an interaction between digital technology and family changes, which jointly intensifies the behavior of family disconnection.

### 2.2 Variable Settings and Data Sources

The dependent variable of this study is the degree of limited family disconnection among young people, which is comprehensively measured from three aspects: frequency of interaction with relatives, willingness to contact relatives actively, and emotional satisfaction. The core independent variables include two categories: one is the digital technology variable, including the duration of online social activities, the difference in digital skills between generations, and the sense of online relationship substitution; the other is the family change variable, including family structure type, the

degree of intergenerational value conflict, the quality of emotional feedback, and the atmosphere of family affection education. The control variables include gender, grade, place of origin, whether they are only children, and average monthly living expenses.

The research data were obtained through a questionnaire survey using a combination of convenience sampling and stratified sampling. The survey subjects covered different types of young people in terms of grade, major, place of origin, and whether they are only children to ensure the balance and representativeness of the sample structure. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and 405 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective recovery rate of 90%. The sample size meets the basic requirements for empirical analysis. The questionnaire content includes individual basic information, digital technology usage, family structure and intergenerational interaction, interaction with relatives, and emotional satisfaction.

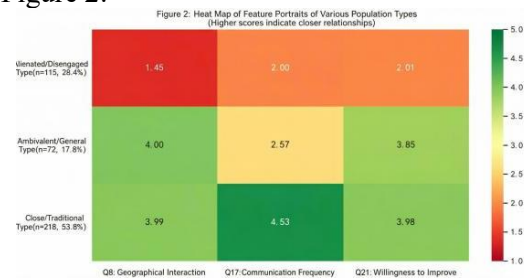
### 3. Analysis of the Formation Mechanism and Influencing Factors of "Limited Disconnection from Kin" among Young People

#### 3.1 Analysis of the Characteristics of "Limited Disconnection from Kin" among Young People

The disconnection of young people from their kin presents four distinct features. First, low-frequency interaction: nearly 60% of young people have less than three interactions with their collateral relatives each year, and most only maintain symbolic contact during important festivals such as the Spring Festival [1]. Second, superficial relationships: over half of the young people feel that their communication with relatives lacks depth, and nearly half of them believe that their relatives cannot understand their real pressures [7]. Third, selective disconnection: the disconnection of young people mainly occurs with collateral relatives, while their relationship with their parents has not weakened, showing a pattern of "distinguishing between close and distant relatives and selective disconnection" [2]. Fourth, emotional comfort: young people value the feeling of getting along and are unwilling to force themselves to participate in uncomfortable interactions just to maintain blood ties [8]. Overall, the

disconnection of young people from their kin is not a complete break but rather a "limited disconnection" that reduces ineffective interactions, pursues a moderate distance, and emphasizes emotional quality [8].

The results of cluster analysis show that the characteristics of the three types of kinship relationship patterns are as follows, as shown in Figure 2:



**Figure 2. Heat Map of Population Characteristics**

Close/Traditional Type (218 people, accounting for 53.8%): They score high on all three dimensions (indicated by the dark green high-value areas in the heat map), showing frequent kinship interactions, a strong willingness to improve communication, and a positive attitude towards cross-regional visits, representing the continuation of traditional kinship relationships.

Distant/Disconnection Type (115 people, accounting for 28.4%): They score low on all three dimensions (indicated by the red low-value areas in the heat map), showing a long-term lack of in-depth interaction, no willingness to improve communication, and a refusal to visit relatives across regions, being the core group of the disconnection phenomenon.

Swinging/General Type (72 people, accounting for 17.8%): Their scores on the three dimensions are in the middle transition zone, showing moderate interaction frequency, ambiguous willingness to improve communication, and a neutral attitude towards cross-regional visits, representing the marginal group between the close type and the distant type.

#### 3.2 Factors Influencing Limited Disconnection from Family among Young People

##### 3.2.1 Education and development orientation

The level of education is significantly correlated with the recognition that "personal development takes precedence over family relationships" ( $\chi^2=73.462$ ,  $df=16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and there is a clear directional trend. Among respondents with a

postgraduate degree or higher, 78.8% agree that personal development should take priority, 51.1% with a bachelor's degree, and only 17.8% with a junior high school education or lower. Education not only enhances social mobility but also reshapes the perception of family relationships. The individualistic values conveyed by higher education create tension with traditional family ethics, providing a conceptual basis for disconnection from family.

### 3.2.2 Economic development logic

The perception of the impact of economic development is highly significantly correlated with the willingness to visit relatives across regions ( $\chi^2=262.524$ ,  $df=16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Among those who believe that economic development "significantly strengthens" disconnection from family, 72.8% are willing to visit relatives across regions, while only 39.4% of those who believe it "significantly weakens" are willing, and 57.1% are "very unwilling". Economic development increases interaction costs through residential dispersion and the efficiency-oriented value system it shapes, squeezing the time resources for maintaining family ties, objectively promoting disconnection from family.

### 3.2.3 Technological media intervention

The impact of technology on disconnection from family is dual, and all related tests are significant. The change in communication methods brought about by technology is significantly correlated with the willingness to visit relatives across regions ( $\chi^2=233.740$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Among those who believe it "completely changes", 80.9% are willing to visit, while only 9.6% of those who believe it "has no change" are willing. The privacy settings of social media are also significantly correlated with the willingness to visit relatives across regions ( $\chi^2=244.925$ ,  $df=16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Among those who "completely agree" that privacy settings lead to disconnection from family, only 32.9% are willing to visit. Technology provides convenient tools for cross-regional communication, but also weakens emotional connections due to the strengthening of privacy boundaries and the superficiality of online interactions.

### 3.2.4 Intergenerational communication barriers

After breaking down the factors of intergenerational communication barriers and conducting a chi-square test with the frequency of in-depth communication, only the differences in lifestyle and habits ( $\chi^2=12.363$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.015$ )

and language and expression methods ( $\chi^2=10.720$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.030$ ) are significantly correlated with interaction frequency. Other factors have no significant impact. This indicates that intergenerational differences do not necessarily lead to disconnection from family, only differences that touch the core mechanism of interaction will substantially weaken kinship.

### 3.2.5 Family structure

There is no significant statistical association between family structure and the frequency of in-depth communication with relatives ( $\chi^2=6.701$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=0.569$ ). The proportion of interaction frequency among the three types of family structures is small and has no statistical significance, indicating that family structure itself is not a decisive factor in disconnection from family.

Summarizing the above issues and responding to the influencing factors.

## 3.3 The Formation Mechanism of "Limited Disconnection from Family" among the Youth

(1) Interwoven multiple causes with core driving factors standing out

Disconnection from family is the result of the interplay of multiple factors, with education and personal development, economic logic, technological media, and intergenerational communication being the four core drivers. The high-education group focuses on personal development, and their modern values clash with traditional family ethics, providing a conceptual basis for disconnection from family. Economic development leads to the dispersion of occupations and residences, increasing the cost of family interaction, and the efficiency-oriented approach also squeezes the time and resources for maintaining family ties. Technological media facilitate remote communication but also weaken intergenerational emotions due to the superficiality of online interaction and the strengthening of privacy boundaries. The differences in life, language, and cognition between generations create communication barriers, directly triggering disconnection from family. Family structure has no significant impact on kinship interaction, correcting the traditional perception.

(2) The impact of disconnection from family diffuses in multiple dimensions, with significant impacts on the family and cultural levels

The impact of disconnection from family

extends beyond individual families and diffuses in multiple dimensions, with the most prominent impacts on family functions and cultural inheritance. In terms of cultural inheritance, disconnection from family reduces member interaction, and traditional customs, etiquette, and intergenerational memories gradually weaken. Over half of the respondents believe that it impacts family cultural inheritance and poses a long-term threat to cultural diversity. In terms of family functions, the lack of intergenerational communication leads to member estrangement and a decline in cohesion. Seven out of ten respondents believe that this will weaken the core functions of the family and affect family stability. At the individual level, the impact of disconnection from family is two-sided. Some people think it can enhance independence, while the majority retain the willingness to repair family ties. 53.6% of the respondents are willing to improve communication with their elders.

(3) The alleviation path requires synergistic efforts, and a multi-level response system should be constructed

The alleviation of disconnection from family requires the concerted efforts of individuals, families, society, and the government to build a comprehensive response system. At the individual and family levels, individuals should change their concepts and attach importance to family ties, and family members should build communication bridges, re-establish emotional connections through regular interaction, and be inclusive of generational differences. At the technological level, the positive role of technology should be leveraged, guiding in-depth and warm online interaction, and avoiding excessive privacy settings and superficial communication barriers. At the social level, community platforms should be established, creating intergenerational contact opportunities through volunteer activities and festival collaborations, and fostering an atmosphere that values family ties. At the government level, the guiding role of policies should be played, policies should be improved to reduce family pressure, family-building concepts should be disseminated, and policy support should be provided.

#### **4. Alleviation Paths for the "Limited Disconnection" among Young People**

The essence of the "limited disconnection"

among young people is the adaptive transformation of traditional kinship relations in the process of modernization, rather than an irreversible "relationship break". By combining the mediating role of digital technology and the core influence of family evolution, four dimensions can be constructed to alleviate this issue: technology empowerment, intergenerational collaboration, emotional reconstruction, and moral cultivation, promoting the formation of a new type of kinship relationship that is suitable for modern society.

#### **4.1 Utilizing Digital Technology to Narrow the Intergenerational Gap**

To bridge the digital divide and make technology a bond of affection, the following measures can be taken: first, conduct digital skills training for the elderly, with the participation of communities, schools, and families, helping the elders learn to use smartphones, video calls, and family group chats to reduce the digital gap between generations [5]; second, encourage young people to take on the role of digital mentors, enhancing communication while teaching the elders to use devices, turning technological barriers into opportunities for interaction [5,9]; third, guide families to maintain affection through digital tools, such as sharing family albums, having regular video calls, and organizing online family activities, so that distance is no longer an obstacle [5,9]; fourth, advocate for young people to manage their online time appropriately, avoiding excessive immersion in the virtual world and maintaining the space and willingness for real-life interactions [4,5].

#### **4.2 Strengthening Intergenerational Collaboration to Promote Inclusive Communication**

Establishing an equal and respectful communication model to reduce ideological conflicts: first, elders should change their communication methods, reducing preaching, comparison, and interrogation, respecting the life choices of the young, and practicing more listening and less judgment [3,10]; second, young people should enhance understanding and tolerance, proactively explaining their thoughts to elders, reducing confrontational emotions, and establishing boundaries in a gentle manner [7,8]; third, families should form a communication consensus, avoiding sensitive and controversial

topics, and focusing on discussing life experiences, shared memories, and light-hearted content to enhance the comfort of interactions [10], fourth, strengthen the awareness of intergenerational boundaries, maintaining care without interference and closeness without entanglement, keeping the kinship at an appropriate distance [3,10].

#### **4.3 Reconstructing Kinship Emotions to Enhance Empathetic Support**

Improving the quality of interactions and strengthening the emotional support function: first, shift kinship interactions from "formal visits" to "emotional exchanges", reducing meaningless gatherings and increasing heartfelt communication [7,8], second, relatives should enhance empathy and support, offering understanding and encouragement when the young encounter difficulties, rather than pressure and criticism [7], third, use traditional festivals and family commemorative activities to create high-quality interaction opportunities, rebuilding emotional memories and intimacy [5,9], fourth, encourage relatives to provide practical help and emotional support, allowing young people to truly feel the value of kinship and enhance the bond [7,8].

#### **4.4 Cultivating Kinship Morality to Reconstruct Kinship Concepts**

Balancing individual autonomy and family responsibility to reshape modern kinship concepts: first, families should attach importance to kinship education, respecting individuals while conveying the family values of responsibility, gratitude, and tolerance [3,11], second, schools should integrate family ethics and family culture construction into education, guiding young people to view kinship relationships correctly [11], third, society should promote a healthy modern kinship concept, advocating a moderate kinship model of "intimate but not overly close, distant but not disconnected" [5,11], fourth, promote the collaborative efforts of families, schools, and society to build a modern family ethics that respects individual freedom while maintaining warm connections [2,11].

### **5. Conclusion and Discussion**

This study reveals that the phenomenon of "limited disconnection from family" among young people is a typical social phenomenon

driven by the mediating role of digital technology and the transformation of family structure. Essentially, it is a rational selection and active reconstruction of traditional kinship relations by young people in the process of individualization, rather than a simple indifference to kinship concepts. Empirical results show that factors such as the duration of online social activities, intergenerational value conflicts, and insufficient emotional feedback significantly influence the tendency to disconnect from family, and there are obvious differences and interaction effects among different groups. The study suggests that on the basis of respecting young people's autonomous choices, efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide through technological empowerment, resolve intergenerational conflicts through intergenerational collaboration, enhance relationship quality through emotional reconstruction, and balance individual and family responsibilities through moral cultivation, thereby building an equal, inclusive, and close yet not overly dependent modern kinship relationship. However, this study still has certain limitations, including a relatively limited sample size, insufficient sample heterogeneity, lack of thorough robustness tests and endogeneity analysis, and a research method that is mainly based on questionnaires, which is somewhat monotonous. In the future, the coverage can be expanded, qualitative research such as in-depth interviews can be supplemented, and the measurement and testing process can be improved to further enhance the reliability and generalizability of the conclusions.

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