

Relationships benefit when parents and adult children use multiple communication channels

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'Call your mother' may be the familiar refrain, but research from the University of Kansas shows that being able to text, email and Facebook dad may be just as important for young adults.

Jennifer Schon, a doctoral student in [communication](#) studies, found that [adult children](#)'s relationship satisfaction with their parents is modestly influenced by the number of communication tools, such as cell phones, email, [social networking sites](#), they use to communicate.

Schon had 367 adults between the ages of 18 and 29 fill out a survey on what methods of communications they used to connect with their parents, how often they used the technology and how satisfied they were in their relationship with mom and dad. Among other items, communication methods included landline phones, cell phones, texting, instant messaging, Snapchat, email, video calls, social networking sites and online gaming networks.

"A lot of parents might resist new technologies. They don't see the point in them or they seem like a lot of trouble," Schon said. "But this study shows while it might take some work and learning, it would be worth it in the end if you are trying to have a good relationship with your adult child."

Schon's research "Dad Doesn't Text: Examining How Parents' Use of

Information Communication Technologies Influences Satisfaction Among Emerging Adult Children," was published online this fall in the journal of *Emerging Adulthood*. Schon's research is also the basis for her thesis, which in November will receive the "Outstanding Thesis Award," from the Interpersonal Communication Division of the National Communication Association.

Schon's study expands on previous research at KU, which showed friends with closer relationships used more channels to communicate. Schon's study was the first to look at communication between [young adults](#) and their parents.

In most relationships, the research shows that adding an additional channel of communication has a modest increase in relationship quality and satisfaction. On average, participants reported using about three channels to communicate with [parents](#).

"So, if you are only using one or two technologies to communicate, adding a third might hit the sweet spot for [relationship satisfaction](#)," Schon said.

Schon said a parent's basic communication competency, in other words their ability to get a message across effectively and appropriately, is the best indicator for how happy the child is in the relationship. Parents who are already strong communicators won't see much of a difference by adding another way to communicate. Parents who were seen as poor communicators benefited the most from adding another communication tool.

"If you realize you are not the best communicator and you don't have the best relationship with your child, adding another channel, such as Facebook or email, might improve the [relationship](#)," Schon said.

In particular, Schon's research points to fathers who tend to use fewer channels of communication and communicate less frequently and for shorter amounts of time.

"When there was a significance difference in parental satisfaction, it always favored mothers, who the participants had more access with," Schon said. "On cell phones in particular, it was much easier to reach mothers than fathers."

This research and a follow-up study Schon is working on indicate that the frequency of communication is also important. More is better, especially when at least some of the messages are just sent to maintain contact, rather than convey important pieces of information. It could be a simple 'good morning' or 'good night.'

"Current technologies encourage us to desire connectedness with people we are close to even though we aren't with them all the time," Schon said.

Provided by University of Kansas

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