International Journal of Asian Social Science Research ; Vol.3, No.6; 2026
E-ISSN: 3006-2179 P-ISSN: 3005-754X
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70267/ijassr.v3n6.7384
Published by: Zeus Press

Causes of Parent–Child Conflict over Adolescents' Use of Electronic Devices and Multi-Actor Collaborative Countermeasures

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Abstract

Electronic devices are now central to adolescents' learning, social life, and leisure, and disputes over their use have become a leading source of parent–child conflict, with consequences for both family harmony and adolescent mental health. This review moves beyond the usual "problem-correction" framing and re-examines such conflict through two lenses: intergenerational power interaction and family-system synergy. Drawing on adolescent developmental-stage theory, family systems theory, and the strengths perspective, and on 29 sources published between 2014 and 2024, the paper analyses how these conflicts arise and what sustains them. It argues that conflict is better read as a signal of shifting family power boundaries than as a simple self-control failure, and outlines differentiated, multi-actor directions for response—spanning family negotiation, school digital-literacy education, platform accountability, and policy support—rather than one fixed protocol. The aim is to shift the conversation from controlling the device to rebuilding the relationship.

Keywords

adolescents, electronic devices, parent–child conflict, intergenerational power interaction, family system synergy, digital parenting, de-problematization

1. Introduction

Electronic devices have become the primary tools for adolescents' learning, social interaction, and entertainment. The Research Report on Internet Use of Minors in China in 2021 shows that the number of underage internet users in China has reached 191 million, with as many as 91.3% accessing the internet via mobile phones [1]. A survey by the China Youth Research Center further indicates that nearly 90% of families have experienced quarrels of varying intensity over adolescents' device use, and about 30% of families experience such conflicts weekly or more frequently [2]. Disputes over the boundaries of device use have become the most prominent trigger of parent–child conflict. The focal points center on three aspects: usage duration, content browsed, and social permissions; the settings have also expanded from mere time control to multiple levels such as content consumption, peer interaction, and privacy boundaries. Some adolescents even confront their parents violently over device confiscation, leading to extreme incidents [3]. Adolescence is inherently a stage in which the frequency of parent–child conflict rises, and the accumulation of such conflict is stably associated with adolescents' emotional distress and problem behaviors [4]. This means that such conflict is not merely a household triviality; it also concerns adolescents' mental health and socialization.

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Existing research has explored this topic from the angles of smartphone dependence, parenting styles, and family communication, but three limitations remain overall. First, the research perspective mostly stays at "problem correction," treating adolescents' device use itself as a deviant behavior to be eliminated, and rarely understanding the function of conflict from the perspective of family system adaptation. Parents' media intervention strategies have long centered on restrictive mediation, that is, controlling use by limiting duration, blocking content, and confiscating devices, yet the intervention effect is unstable [5]; domestic intervention studies also mostly treat reducing smartphone dependence as the sole outcome indicator, and rarely incorporate the parent–child relationship itself into effectiveness evaluation [6]. Second, countermeasures remain at the level of principles, lacking operational tools and procedures that families can use directly. Third, countermeasures tend to be "one-size-fits-all." Existing research suggests that the conflict characteristics of adolescents from different family types differ markedly [7], yet matching differentiated designs are still rare at the countermeasure level.

In view of this, this study adopts a literature review method. On the basis of a systematic review of existing research, it integrates adolescent development stage theory, family systems theory, and the strengths perspective, and takes intergenerational power interaction and family system synergy as two main lines to analyze the triggering mechanisms and causes of parent–child conflict over adolescents' device use.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Method and Literature Screening

To make the review process replicable, this study followed the norms of a systematic literature review to conduct retrieval and screening. The retrieval sources are divided into three categories: first, Chinese databases, including CNKI and Wanfang Data; second, English databases, including the Web of Science Core Collection and PsycINFO and ERIC on the EBSCOhost platform; third, official texts, including laws, regulations, and policy documents publicly issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the State Council, and the Ministry of Education, as well as survey and research reports issued by institutions such as the China Youth Research Center.

Retrieval adopted grouped term matching. Chinese search terms consist of three groups: adolescents or puberty; mobile phones, electronic devices, screen time, or internet use; parent–child conflict, parent–child relationship, parenting, or parental intervention; intersections are taken between groups and unions within groups. English search terms also consist of three groups: adolescent or youth; screen time, smartphone, internet use, or digital media; parent–child conflict, parent–child relationship, parenting, or parental mediation. The retrieval time range was set from January 2014 to December 2024.

There are three inclusion criteria: the research subjects are adolescents aged 10–24 or their parents; the research content involves household use of electronic devices or digital media and the resulting parent–child interaction; and the document type is a publicly published journal article, academic monograph, or formally issued policy text or research report. There are two exclusion criteria: technology-oriented studies with adults as the sole subjects, and documents for which the full text is inaccessible and the abstract information is insufficient to judge relevance. Screening was executed in three steps: first, merge retrieval results from all databases and deduplicate; second, read titles and abstracts and remove obviously irrelevant documents; third, conduct a close full-text reading of the retained documents after initial screening and re-screen them against the above inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, 29 documents were included, 18 in Chinese and 11 in English.

The analysis adopted a combination of thematic review and theoretical coding. First, a literature information table was established by research theme, research subjects, and core findings; then the included literature was re-classified along the two dimensions of intergenerational power interaction and family system synergy, on the basis of which the gaps in existing research were identified and the analytical framework of this study was determined.

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2.2 International Research Context

International work on digital device use and parent–child conflict began earlier and has moved, roughly, from "time control" toward "relationship adaptation." Early studies treated screen time as the variable of interest and looked at its effects on schoolwork, sleep, and mood; more recent work shifts to family-process variables—parenting style, communication quality, and how the system operates. Along the parenting-style line, Baumrind [9] links authoritarian parenting to higher conflict and lower competence, which helps explain how power is exercised at home. Self-determination theory [8] is useful here: it treats autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic needs, and device use as one way adolescents pursue them digitally. On parental mediation, the literature distinguishes restrictive, instructive, and co-use strategies and generally favours the last two [5]. The evidence is not wholly one-sided, though. Some intervention studies report that structured restriction, when paired with explanation, still lowers conflict [6], so the issue may be less "restrict versus co-use" than how consistently and transparently any rule is applied. Positive psychology adds a further angle: Peterson and Seligman's [10] work on character strengths suggests looking at what adolescents do well, not only at what goes wrong.

2.3 Domestic Research Progress

Domestic research mainly unfolds along three lines. The first focuses on intervention paths for adolescents' smartphone dependence. He and Wang [6] examined the effect of multi-family group intervention on smartphone dependence and parent–child relationship, and found that improving family interaction and communication quality can reduce dependence and conflict. The second looks at specific variables within the family system. Huang and Zhang [12] tested the link between family communication patterns and smartphone dependence, with parent–child conflict as a moderator; Li and Wang [13] analysed the intergenerational digital divide's effect on the relationship from a family-systems angle; Liu and Chen [14] examined parenting style's effect on device-use conflict and the mediating role of intergenerational communication. The third line addresses intervention strategies themselves. Zhao and Sun [7] compared conflict features across family types; Zhao and Sun [15] looked at parents' digital-parenting competence; Zhou and Wu [16] explored how to draft and implement family media-use agreements, arguing that jointly negotiated agreements can cut digital conflict. The domestic picture is also mixed in a way worth noting: He and Wang [6] show joint intervention eases dependence, yet Liu and Chen [14] find parenting-style effects run mainly through communication quality—implying that handing a family a tool without changing how they talk may do little. That tension is part of why this review treats communication, not just rules, as the central lever. In addition, platform-side algorithmic design and commercial logic have begun to draw attention [11].

2.4 Research Gaps and the Positioning of This Study

In summary, existing research has achieved fairly rich results in revealing the causes of conflict, but three obvious gaps remain. First, in perspective it over-emphasizes "problem correction," treating device use itself as the source of the problem, lacking analysis of conflict causes from the angle of intergenerational power interaction, and lacking discussion of the positive function of conflict from the angle of family system adaptation. Second, the operability of countermeasures is insufficient; most studies stop at principled statements such as "communication should be strengthened" and "digital literacy should be improved," lacking tools and procedures that families can directly follow, let alone execution standards and effect-determination bases. Third, the targeting of countermeasures is insufficient; insufficient attention is paid to the differences in conflict focal points among adolescents of different ages and families of different types, making the suggestions difficult to match specific situations.

These three gaps point to a fairly clear task. Rather than adding another "control the phone" prescription, this review reorganises the analysis around intergenerational power and family-system synergy, offers a few concrete but adaptable tools (a sample agreement, communication scaffolds, suggested standards), and differentiates the advice by age group and family type so that family, school, society, and policy can be pulled into a single process.

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3. Theoretical Foundations

3.1 Adolescent Development Stage Theory

3.1.1 Theoretical Connotation

The adolescent development stage theory referred to in this study mainly refers to the part of Erikson's psychosocial development stage theory concerning adolescence. The theory divides a person's life into eight stages, each corresponding to a set of psychosocial conflicts to be resolved. Adolescence corresponds to the fifth stage, whose core conflict is identity versus role confusion: the individual needs to answer questions such as "who am I" and "what kind of person do I want to become," and integrate past experience, current abilities, and future social roles into a coherent self-image [17]. To complete this integration, adolescents need a permitted period of exploration, during which they can try different roles, values, and ways of interacting without having to bear fixed adult responsibilities immediately. Identity construction mainly occurs in four domains: occupational orientation, ideology and value orientation, gender roles, and peer relationships. Proceeding in parallel with identity construction is the expansion of autonomy: adolescents begin to demand decision-making power over personal affairs and become highly sensitive to external coercive intervention.

3.1.2 Social Domain Theory's Refinement of Autonomy Claims

Erikson's stage theory explains the general trend of autonomy expansion in adolescence, while the specific boundaries of autonomy claims across different family affairs are given a finer characterization by social domain theory (proposed by Turiel and developed by Smetana). This theory is independent of Erikson's stage theory, yet together they explain adolescent autonomy development. Adolescents' claims to autonomy are not general; their performance differs across domains of affairs. Social domain theory divides family affairs into three categories: the moral domain, the prudential domain, and the personal domain. The moral domain concerns right and wrong; the prudential domain concerns safety and consequences; in these two types of affairs adolescents generally acknowledge parental authority; the personal domain concerns hobbies, appearance, privacy, and peer interaction, and adolescents tend to believe that these affairs should be decided by themselves, and parental intervention is a transgression [18]. As adolescence advances, the scope classified by adolescents into the personal domain continuously expands, while the scope classified by parents into the personal domain often lags, and the discrepancy between the two is an important source of parent–child conflict.

3.1.3 Theoretical Implication: The Generative Logic of Device-Use Conflict

Applying the above two perspectives to device use yields three specific inferences. First, electronic devices are not merely entertainment tools for adolescents; they are also digital settings for completing identity construction and autonomous exploration [17]. When adolescents choose whom to follow, post content, and join communities on platforms, they are essentially trying out different self-presentation styles and peer positions [19]; therefore, depriving them of devices equals cutting off their exploration channel and easily triggers strong resistance. Second, adolescents generally classify content choice, chat records, and social accounts into the personal domain, while parents tend to classify the same affairs into the prudential domain or even the moral domain [18]. The two sides' judgments about "who decides this matter" differ, which is why the same usage behavior is seen as a legitimate right by adolescents but as behavior needing correction by parents. This directly suggests that the core of conflict is a dispute over permission attribution, not simply insufficient self-control. Third, the scope of the personal domain expands with age [18], which explains the age-stage differences in autonomy claims: adolescents aged 12–14 mainly fight for permission on usage duration, those aged 15–17 care more about privacy and social freedom, and those above 18 demand equal participation in rule-making. This provides a direct basis for designing intervention strategies by age group in later chapters. A caveat is in order: Erikson's stage model and the social-domain findings were largely built on Western, often middle-class, samples, so whether the exact age boundaries (12–14, 15–17) travel cleanly to Chinese families is an empirical question, not a settled fact.

Self-determination theory can further explain why adolescents are attracted to electronic devices. The theory holds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three basic psychological needs, and when these needs are not met in real-life situations, individuals turn to other situations for compensation [8]. Electronic devices happen to provide all three satisfactions simultaneously: adolescents can autonomously decide what to watch and with whom to interact, gain immediate feedback and a sense of achievement in games and digital

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creation, and maintain peer relationships through social platforms. This also explains why mere confiscation and disconnection often backfire: what is taken away is not only the device itself but also the alternative channel for satisfying the three basic needs.

3.2 Family Systems Theory

3.2.1 Theoretical Connotation

Family systems theory is jointly founded by Bowen's family systems therapy theory and Minuchin's structural family therapy theory [20, 21]. Its core propositions can be summarized in three points. First, wholeness and interdependence: the family is not a simple sum of individuals but an organic whole composed of several subsystems such as the couple, parent–child, and sibling subsystems, and any change in one subsystem ripples to other subsystems and even the whole family. Second, boundaries and structure: the family relies on boundaries to define who participates in what affairs and in what way; overly rigid boundaries cause a lack of communication between subsystems, while overly diffuse boundaries cause role confusion and unclear responsibilities; both extremes weaken the family's adaptability. Third, homeostasis and feedback loops: the family tends to maintain existing interaction patterns, and when encountering external disturbance, the existing feedback loops pull it back to the original state; when the disturbance exceeds the system's regulatory capacity, the system can only rebuild balance by changing its own rules and structure, and this process is often accompanied by obvious conflict.

3.2.2 Theoretical Implication: The Systemic Meaning of Conflict

From this perspective, parent–child conflict triggered by adolescents' device use is not the fault of a certain family member but a boundary-adjustment signal issued by the family system: adolescents' developmental needs have advanced to a stage requiring more personal domain, while the family's existing power distribution and interaction rules still remain in the child-oriented unidirectional parenting mode, and the gap between the two makes the original homeostasis difficult to maintain. The persistence and escalation of conflict are often related to the failure of internal system synergy. Inconsistency between parents in rule standards and enforcement intensity blurs the boundaries of the parent–child subsystem; the lack of a stable communication loop between parents and children prevents differences from being digested within the system; and the lack of information exchange and responsibility connection between the family and external systems such as schools and communities leaves the family without timely support when encountering difficulties. Domestic research based on this theory also suggests that the gap between generations in digital skills and media experience changes the power structure and communication style within the family, thereby affecting parent–child relationships [13].

Family systems theory is strong on description but weaker on prescription. Its talk of "healthy boundaries" and "good homeostasis" can sound culturally neutral while quietly importing a particular—often Western nuclear-family—ideal. Whether its normative claims fit Chinese intergenerational living arrangements is worth flagging before the theory is turned into advice.

3.3 Strengths Perspective

3.3.1 Theoretical Connotation

The strengths perspective originated in positive psychology, and its representative achievement is the classification system of character strengths and virtues proposed by Peterson and Seligman [10]. This system summarizes human positive traits into six categories—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—with 24 measurable character strengths in total, and holds that these strengths are important resources for promoting individual physical and mental health and buffering stress and negative emotions. At the level of intervention practice, the theory proposes a three-stage model of identification, exploration, and application: first help the individual identify the strengths they already possess, then explore the ways to apply the strengths in specific situations, and finally transform the strengths into stable behavior patterns through conscious practice.

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3.3.2 Theoretical Implication: The Basis for De-Problematization Intervention

The strengths perspective provides a direct basis for "de-problematization" intervention. The traditional intervention model often treats adolescents as the party to be corrected and parents as the authority executing correction, with intervention content concentrated on criticizing adolescents' overuse or correcting parents' improper parenting; the strengths perspective instead excavates the positive motivations and existing resources behind both sides' behaviors, including adolescents' curiosity about new things, the operational and creative abilities already accumulated in the digital environment, and parents' sense of responsibility and life experience for their children's healthy growth behind their worries. The core of intervention thus changes from judging who is right and who is wrong to helping both sides see each other's positive claims and using these resources to jointly formulate rules. Existing family practice research shows that adopting parent–child joint negotiation to establish media use agreements can reduce digital-related family conflict [16]; family-unit group intervention research also shows that incorporating the goal of improving parent–child interaction quality into intervention helps reduce adolescents' smartphone dependence [6]. The perspective is not without critics. Its optimism can understate structural constraints—platform design, poverty, parental working hours—that reframing alone will not remove; a strengths lens works best alongside, not instead of, material support.

4. Conflict Status and Cause Analysis

4.1 Conflict Status and Basic Characteristics

Overall, parent–child conflict triggered by electronic devices is no longer limited to academic and daily triviality, and has become the primary trigger of parent–child contradiction. The Comparative Study Report on Parent–Child Relationships in the Internet Era among China, the US, Japan and South Korea shows that among the 82.1% of primary and secondary school students who have quarreled with their parents, 25.2% of the conflicts revolve directly around device use [3].

In terms of manifestation, explicit conflict is mainly reflected in quarrels, smashing devices, and cold silence; implicit conflict is more reflected in adolescents' underground device use, including privately purchasing backup devices, using incognito browsing mode, and registering social accounts unknown to parents. Such hidden behaviors are common in junior and senior high school stages; they create a systematic deviation between the information parents master and the actual usage situation, weakening the original trust basis between the two sides, prompting parents to intensify control, which in turn reinforces adolescents' concealment behavior. The settings where conflict occurs have also expanded from the family to schools, public places, and more spaces.

4.2 Multi-Level Analysis of Conflict Causes

4.2.1 Individual Level: The Contradiction Between Adolescents' Developmental Needs and the Digital Environment

The core task of the adolescent development stage is to complete identity construction and autonomy expansion, and electronic devices provide them with a digital setting to accomplish this task. But at the same time, adolescents' self-regulation ability is still developing, and in the face of platform designs such as autoplay, infinite scroll, and daily tasks, they are prone to uncontrollable use [11]. Insufficient digital discrimination ability makes them more vulnerable to harmful information and cyberbullying, which in turn aggravates parents' worries and intervention. In addition, adolescents grow up in the digital environment and generally evaluate their own digital skills highly, while parents mostly contact similar technologies only after adulthood; the gap in media experience between the two generations makes "who knows better" a repeatedly appearing implicit issue in disputes [22].

4.2.2 Family Level: Imbalance in Intergenerational Power Interaction

The individual level explains why adolescents need to use devices, while the intergenerational power interaction at the family level explains why conflict is difficult to avoid. The power referred to here is the distribution pattern of who decides, how to decide, and who executes on family affairs. First, there is tension between the asymmetry of the power structure and the need for renegotiation. The power structure of traditional

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families is built on parents' advantage in resources and experience; the formulation and execution rights of device-use rules have long been unilaterally held by parents; while adolescents' autonomy claims require transferring part of the decision-making power to themselves, which is essentially a demand for power redistribution. When parents insist on responding to this demand with unilateral adjudication, the conflict escalates from "how long to use" to "who has the final say" [18].

Second, there is a cognitive dislocation in permission attribution. Parents and adolescents differ markedly in their cognition of technology, usage habits, and value judgments: parents emphasize the rules and order of the real world and tend to classify device use as a safety issue requiring supervision; adolescents regard devices as daily tools for learning, socializing, and entertainment, and classify content choice, chat records, and social accounts as personal affairs. This intergenerational digital divide makes it difficult for the two sides to reach consensus when formulating rules and evaluating behavior [13]. Third, parenting style determines the specific form of power interaction. Authoritarian parenting tends to unilaterally formulate rules and demand obedience, and is associated with higher conflict levels in adolescents [9]; indulgent parenting lacks necessary rules and supervision, and after device use gets out of control it easily turns to sudden tightening, triggering more intense confrontation; neglectful parenting neglects discipline due to insufficient digital literacy or limited energy, with fewer conflicts in the short term but potentially more serious usage problems accumulated in the long term. The quality of parent–child communication differs markedly under different parenting styles; communication lacking equal negotiation space can only temporarily suppress differences, and instead reinforces adolescents' concealment and confrontation behaviors [14].

4.2.3 Family System Level: Failure of Subsystem Synergy

Even given the above tensions, the family system itself still has self-regulation ability; the more direct reason why conflict recurs and gradually escalates is the failure of internal system synergy and the absence of external support, manifested in three situations. First, inconsistency within the parental subsystem. If parents are inconsistent in rule standards and enforcement intensity over a long period, children will turn to the more lenient parent for exemption, and the boundaries of the parent–child subsystem thus become blurred, and the rules themselves lose binding force [7]. Second, the family lacks a stable communication loop. Many families only discuss rules when conflict breaks out; communication under emotional opposition cannot produce effective information exchange, and differences are repeatedly shelved and repeatedly erupt, forming a cycle. Third, the connection between the family and external systems is insufficient. Schools master students' device-use situation at school, communities and professional institutions master intervention resources, and platforms master the addictive design and control tools of products, but in actual operation, these types of actors and families lack normalized information exchange and responsibility connection; families often can only face conflict alone, lacking accessible channels for help and referral [23].

4.2.4 Social Level: Defects in the Digital Ecology and Imperfect Support System

From a macro perspective, an imperfect digital ecological environment is an external factor triggering such parent–child conflict. On the one hand, the business model of some internet platforms is built on maximizing user dwell time; designs such as autoplay, infinite scroll, daily tasks, and personalized recommendations significantly increase adolescents' usage intensity [11]. On the other hand, the governance of harmful information in cyberspace still needs improvement; the risk of adolescents' exposure to violent, pornographic, and fraudulent content objectively exists, creating a prominent contradiction between parents' worries and adolescents' freedom claims.

In terms of the support system, laws and regulations protecting and regulating minors' digital rights have been successively issued [24], but the cross-departmental collaborative governance mechanism is still in the building stage, and the implementation effect of top-level policies remains to be observed. Currently, the supply of professional intervention services for adolescents' electronic device use problems is insufficient; most families lack accessible help channels when conflicts arise. Schools' digital literacy education emphasizes skill training, and cultivation of parent–child communication and digital ethics has not yet formed a normalized arrangement [25]; social support channels such as community family education services and social worker volunteer organizations also need improvement in resource supply and feasible practice plans [23].

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4.3 Group Differences in Conflict Characteristics

It is worth noting that the above causes do not act in the same way or with the same intensity across different groups, which determines that intervention strategies must be differentiated rather than "one-size-fits-all." On the age dimension, conflicts in junior high school (12–14) focus on device usage duration and browsed content, and parents pay more attention to the impact of devices on academic performance; contradictions in senior high school (15–17) revolve more around privacy permissions and social freedom, and adolescents have stronger claims to personal boundaries; groups above 18 can mostly handle usage differences through negotiation. On the family-type dimension, conflicts in urban families are mostly related to internet addiction and exposure to harmful online information; the main reason for conflict in rural left-behind children's families is the absence of guardianship, and adolescents use devices excessively to relieve loneliness; conflicts in intact families mostly stem from differences in parenting styles; parent–child contradictions in divorced single-parent families are often intertwined with emotional alienation and trust crisis [7]. These two groups of differences jointly suggest that intervention is not about adjusting a unified parameter but about finding each family's own balance point in its power structure. The differentiated countermeasures in Chapter 5 are based on this.

5. Differentiated Multi-Actor Collaborative Countermeasures

The following section sketches differentiated directions for response across the family, school, society–platform, and policy levels, with suggestions varying by age and family type. The aim is to indicate where action is needed and what it might look like, not to prescribe a fixed protocol.

5.1 Intervention Focus by Age Group

The content of autonomy needs differs among adolescents of different ages, and the conflict focal point changes accordingly, so the intervention focus should also be adjusted.

5.2 Intervention Focus by Family Type

Family structure determines the deep cause of conflict and also the entry point of intervention. For different types of families, intervention resources should be weighted.

5.3 Family Level: From Concept to Operable Tools

The countermeasures in existing research mostly stay at principled statements such as "parents should change their concepts" and "should improve communication ability," and families still do not know what to do specifically after getting them. This section tries to turn concepts into steps concrete enough that a family could try them, while leaving the exact pacing to be adjusted to context.

5.3.1 Change of Parenting Concepts: Three Observable Actions

The change of concepts needs to show up in observable behavior, or it is hard to tell whether anything shifted. Three small moves are suggested. First, rewrite a vague demand such as "play less" as a negotiable clause—e.g., "no phone after dinner"—so the rule is specific and checkable. Second, let parents name one concrete worry (vision, sleep, schoolwork) instead of the general charge that "you can't control yourself." Third, ask the adolescent to name one digital skill they already have—editing, searching, running a group—and discuss where that ability could help at home; this lines up with the "identification" step in the strengths perspective [10]. None of these requires a fixed timetable; a family can try them across a few meetings and keep what helps.

5.3.2 Sample of the Family Media Use Agreement Tool

To keep "joint rule-making" from staying a slogan, a sample agreement is outlined below. Families should set their own numbers, but keep the clause structure intact so the agreement stays usable. Whether it actually works is best judged informally: if both sides can restate each other's reasons and the rules hold without daily fights, it is taking; if talk keeps sliding back into mutual blame, the clause design or the enforcement needs renegotiation.

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5.3.3 "I-Statement" Three-Step Communication Script

Communication style also needs to be concrete. Borrowing from nonviolent communication [26], the "I-statement" can be broken into three steps: observation (state the fact without judging—"I see you've played for an hour"); feeling (name your own emotion—"I'm a bit worried"); request (ask something specific and negotiable—"could we agree homework first, or you pick an end time?"). The contrast with "you're on the game again, is homework done"—which mixes accusation and question—shows why the first is less likely to provoke defensiveness. A useful habit is a regular family talk, kept short and held when tempers are steady, not improvised in the middle of a fight.

5.4 School Level: Digital Literacy Education and Home–School Collaboration

5.4.1 Standards for Offering Digital Literacy Courses

School digital-literacy education needs more than a one-off lecture. At minimum it should appear in the semester plan, draw on the four dimensions in the compulsory IT curriculum standards [25]—skills, ethics, health, communication—and be taught through discussion or role-play rather than one-way talks, since rehearsing real conflict scenes in class tends to change behavior more than lecturing. How many periods and how they are assessed can follow each school's existing arrangement; the point is that the content becomes routine, not occasional.

5.4.2 Normalized Mechanism of Home–School Collaboration

Schools can also help link families to support. A simple start is a short survey each semester on whether a written agreement exists at home, whether conflict occurred in the past month, and whether parents want outside help; a low return rate is itself a signal that the channel is not working. Training can be tiered—families without an agreement learn to draft one; families struggling to enforce one learn communication and review. For left-behind and single-parent families, topics on emotional connection and remote companionship matter most. When conflict is frequent, schools should refer the family to a community guidance station promptly and follow up—the exact window matters less than not letting it drop.

5.5 Society and Platform Level: Optimizing the Digital Ecology and Support Services

5.5.1 The Obligation Boundary of Platforms and Executable Requirements

Platforms should at least avoid making family supervision harder. Three reasonable expectations: the minor mode should disable autoplay and dwell-time-based recommendations by default and leave the switch to the guardian; guardians should get usable data—per-app time, content ratings, a report entry—so supervision has a basis; and platforms should run digital-literacy activities with schools and communities and share the materials. These draw on the minor-protection provisions in the Cyberspace Regulations [24] and the industry self-regulation convention [27]. The line matters: platforms should supply tools and data, not take over parenting.

5.5.2 Supply Standards for Social Support Services

Public support services need to be specific enough that families know what they can ask for. Family therapy or parent–child training can build on existing guidance institutions; community-based digital-literacy hubs and parent–child groups add low-cost options. For left-behind and single-parent families, tailored support matters most, reached through school referral. Whether a service "works" is best judged by whether referred families actually complete it and whether conflict stays low afterward—figures that should come from real pilots, not be assumed. Where local expertise is thin, online links to outside specialists help. The Family Education Promotion Law [28] already puts such services in the public system, so local governments can fund or commission them.

5.6 Policy Level: Legal Guarantee and Cross-Departmental Collaboration

The policy role is to fix who is responsible, by law, and give collaboration a frame. Concretely: spell out, against the six protection systems in the Minors Protection Law [29], what family, school, platform, and social services each owe in device-use conflict, so no one can pass the buck; use the Family Education Promotion

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Law [28] to put guidance services on the government's public list; and tighten the Cyberspace Regulations [24] on minor mode, content rating, and duration. A standing cross-department channel—education, cyberspace administration, civil affairs, health—would help handle cases that no single body can close. The test is whether responsibilities are named and funded, not the frequency of meetings.

5.7 Collaborative Closed Loop and Effectiveness Evaluation

If the four levels act alone, nothing connects. A simple loop—report, assess, triage, intervene, review—can link them: the family logs and first reports; the school receives via the home–school platform, assesses, and routes mild cases to self-help materials, moderate ones to a community station, severe ones to cross-department consultation; social bodies supply the offline resources; the policy side coordinates and closes violation leads. The referral steps should have a stated time expectation so cases do not stall, but the exact days are less important than keeping the chain moving.

The closed loop must include an evaluation link, otherwise it cannot be judged whether the intervention is truly effective, nor when to exit the intervention.

6. Conclusions and Prospects

6.1 Research Conclusions

Through literature review, theoretical analysis, and cause analysis, this study draws the following three conclusions.

First, parent–child conflict triggered by adolescents' device use is, on the surface, a dispute over device use, but at a deep level it is an imbalance in intergenerational power interaction within the family. Adolescents' autonomy claims require transferring part of the decision-making power from the parent side to themselves, while the family's existing power structure still remains in the unidirectional parenting mode; the difference in the two sides' judgments about "who decides this matter" is the fundamental reason why the same usage behavior is seen as a legitimate right by adolescents but as behavior needing correction by parents. Three types of factors—individuals' developmental needs, family parenting styles, and the external digital ecological environment—interweave to jointly influence the generation and evolution of conflict.

Second, the reason why conflict recurs and gradually escalates lies in the failure of synergy between the family system and its external support systems. Within the family, it is manifested as inconsistency in parenting, absence of communication loops, and blurred subsystem boundaries; between the family and the external environment, it is manifested as the lack of normalized information exchange and responsibility connection among schools, communities, platforms, and policy departments, leaving the family to face conflict alone. This judgment shifts the focus of intervention from changing adolescents' usage behavior to repairing the family's power-negotiation ability and the system's collaborative ability.

At the school, society, and policy levels, through school digital-literacy work, referral channels, support services, and clearer responsibility lines,

6.2 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This review has clear limits. The most obvious is that it rests entirely on published literature; there is no primary data behind the suggestions, so the "tools" are reasoned sketches, not tested instruments. Related to that, the literature screened here stops at 2024 and leans toward English-language and Chinese domestic journals—earlier classic work on family conflict and some studies of minority or immigrant families outside China are not in view, which may flatten the picture. A deeper limit is theoretical: the "de-problematization" idea and the family tools proposed here lean heavily on Western developmental and family theory (Erikson, Bowen, Minuchin, self-determination). How well autonomy-claim and boundary ideas travel to Chinese intergenerational households—where filial expectation and co-residence reshape the power balance—is assumed more than shown. Finally, the review is light on the real-world friction of multi-actor collaboration: who pays, who convenes, and what happens when a school, a platform, and a family disagree are flagged but not solved.

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Where this might go next. Empirical work is the obvious next step: surveys and, better, small intervention trials that put the sample agreement and communication scaffolds in real homes and report what actually happens. That would also tell us which thresholds, if any, are worth keeping. A second direction is to widen the lens—look at earlier family-conflict literature and at non-Chinese family forms, so the analysis is not over-fit to one context. A third is to track how AI-driven features (generative chat, adaptive feeds) are already reshaping the conflict, since the next version of this problem will not look like the current one. None of these requires a grand design; even one careful trial in one school would move the debate past speculation.

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Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

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