

Social Media Access through Smart Devices as a Barrier to Family Communication

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to observe if social media access through smart devices really becomes a barrier to family communication. Descriptive qualitative method was used in this study with the use of purposive sampling and Focus Group Discussion. There were three (3) families interviewed so as to learn more about their behavior and if social media access really affects their communication. To validate and confirm the data gathered from the families questioned, four (4) experts were interviewed — two (2) social media and smart device experts and two (2) life coaches. The results show that when it comes to family communication, social media only becomes a barrier if it already takes the place of face-to-face communication and eventually becomes a priority rather than an option. When members of the families failed to harmoniously weigh their urgencies, communication suffers. Therefore, in order to establish a healthy family communication, parents should exert effort on cultivating their children's communication skills while growing up for this can lead them into an open relationship when time comes. Since family is the basic unit of this society, all of a person's communication skills start from it and when communication within the family fails, a person will have a difficult time, communicating towards other as well. It is recommended that communication should be defined as broad as possible in order to further expand the area of the study as well as its results.

Keywords: Social Media, Family Communication, Barrier, Relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study focused on how social media access through smart phones negatively affects the communication within a family. It pointed out how important family communication is and how these recent additions to technology have become a concrete barrier to it. However, the medias tackled in this study also has an advantageous side, for it may be considered as a bridge to those people whose loved ones are abroad or are far away from them. Having said that, this study only focused on families that are living closely together, possessing smart gadgets with a stable internet connection, so as not to run over the advantage of the topic and also, to avoid confusion. People from different places may have different reactions about the issue depending on the state of their families, cultures and beliefs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media:

Social media refers to share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks this includes blog, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Google +, Youtube and all other social media sites (Tufts, 2013).

Social media is a social instrument of communication because it doesn't just give people information but also interacts with them at the same time. It asks for the individual's comments and suggestions for a particular post and also lets them vote for a specific movie that they like. It has the abilities of recommending friends, and other things that suits user's

interests. It is way too different from the past years for what people usually do back then is watch TV and listen to the radio. These regular media is only a one way street because users tend to only have limited ability in giving feedback. On the other hand, social media act as a two way street that give people the ability to communicate and respond (Nation, 2014).

All the websites that invite persons to interact with other visitors falls on the social media lists. Examples of these are Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Instagram, myspace and other sites that have content based on the User-Generated Content (UCG) (Vangie Beal, 2014).

A lot of people are getting really addicted and hooked up to these media and the very reason why they are is that it give users almost anything they can be happy about he means of interactions among people in which they create, Bocco, 2011). Non-stop stream of messages, thousands of funny posts, new friends to add and much more but social media is just an extension of something that we have always been attracted to. It helps people build bigger communities, make friends and broadcast information as easy as a click (Scott, 2014). Now, Filipinos lead the world in the amount of time spent socializing online: fifty-three (53) hours on average in a week. According to Wave7, a survey yearly done by Manila Bulletin, seventy four (74) percent stated social media satisfied the primary need to stay in touch with friends; meet new people [seventy (70) percent]; have fun [sixty five (65) percent]; share new experiences [sixty three (63) percent]; and keep company [sixty two (62) percent] (Manila Bulletin, 2014).

Social media can be very advantageous to the families not living together as well. Back in time, the only way for people to communicate with their far away loved ones was through mail or letter. Today, people can easily talk to them just by logging on Facebook or Skype. Because of the innovative technologies and the rise of social networking sites, people are now able to reach and keep in touch with their families abroad. In addition, the ability to stay in contact with friends and family across long distances allows people to maintain closer ties (Jackson, n.d.).

Smartphones:

Before smartphones were invented, people need to wait for a long time before receiving messages from someone who's far away by the use of snail mails. Eventually, telephones were invented then later on, are the Personal Digital Assistants widely known as PDA's. Sooner rather than later, cellphones were invented which made communication much easier than it already was. People can now text or send a message to someone instantly and call them whenever they want (Ray, 2012). Another technological innovation in the early 90's paved the way for Smartphones. These handheld devices were defined as a cellular telephone with built-in applications and Internet access. In addition to the digital voice service a regular cellphone provides, modern smartphones offer text messaging, e-mail, Web browsing, still and video cameras, MP3 player and video playback and calling. It also runs myriad free and paid applications, turning the once single-minded cellphone into a mobile personal computer (Smartphones, 2014) One of the reasons that a lot of people really like smartphones is because of all its multi-media features. A typical smartphone has a high-resolution touch screen display, Wi-Fi Connectivity, the ability to accept sophisticated applications and runs on popular operating systems such as iOS and Android (Janssen, n.d.). As a result, communicating with people from other parts of the world becomes easier than ever making face-to-face communication less and less of a priority (Leannlo, 2013). The biggest benefit of these gadgets is that people can always be updated and in contact with everyone. Not only can they communicate through phone calls and text messaging but also through e-mails, chat and IM's. This is the very reason it is much easier to use (My Own Business, n.d.). Also, a lot of people are finding that smartphones can be their personal office. They wouldn't need to carry a bag to bring all their office belongings such as files, folders and important planners because a single smartphone now has the ability to carry all of it for them (Jung, 2014).

Family Communication:

Communication is something that is very essential in every individual's life. It is the act of conveying information for the purpose of creating a shared meaning and it is what humans do every day. It came from a Latin word "communis" which means "to share" and involves verbal and non-verbal human interaction (Communication studies, 2014). The role of communication is to harmonize and integrate the various groups so that they are able to develop creative approaches to solving their problems and meeting basic needs (Braid, 1993).

One of the most important aspects in life that needs perpetual communication is the family. It is the basic unit of society as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction including adults of both

sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children. (Murdock, 1949). In communicating within the family, it is not just the words people speak but also components like facial expressions, body language, tone of speech and posture. Thus, family communication, is sharing information with verbal and nonverbal cues. Moreover, listening is as important as communication because listening allows members of the family to understand the each and everyone's point of view. Therefore, in order to maintain good relations and avoid conflicts inside the family, understanding the functions of communication within the household is a must (Thames & Thomason, 1998). It is important that husband and wife regularly talk with each other to be able to understand each other better. For all people, it can be observed that to listen is the easiest thing to say and understand, and yet the hardest work to do. (Tipanan Marriage Enrichment Committee CFM-Philippines, 1984).

Man is a communicating animal and his life is interwoven with other humans through the medium of communication. Parents should remember that the doors of communication between them and the child should always be kept open even to the degree that it results into problems. Perhaps, this is one of the greatest problems in an average Filipino family. Children are not always given the freedom to communicate their feelings to their parents. Thus Filipino children would rather communicate freely with their uncles, aunts and friends, but not to their parents (Zaide & Fabella, 1968).

In today's muddled world, it is harder for adults and teens to genuinely connect with each other. Many adults find it difficult to listen to teenagers express confusion, disappointment, or resentment. Parents cannot bear to see them unhappy so they dismiss their children's feelings and impose their adult logic. They want to show them the 'right' way to feel, yet what teens need most is for them to listen, not just with the ears, but with the hearts. When parents recognize their children's feelings rather than judge or criticize, they make it easier for them to cope (Carandang & Lee-Chua, 2008).

Why it is that family communication is important? As an individual learns to participate together in meaningful associations, they are able to convey their thoughts of love, dependence, and interest. Strong families support one another and openly share their feelings such as fears, joys and sorrows, even their hopes and dreams with one another. This can only be achieved through effective family communication. Doors of communication will swing open in the home if members will realize time and participation on the part of all are necessary ingredients, especially to family discussions (Ashton, 1976).

Rejection can also be associated with the tendency to punish by withdrawal of attention and affection that merely adds to the sense of being unacknowledged. It inevitably gives rise to resentment and anger that usually results to suspiciousness and intense anger with authority. This is something that should not be present inside a family. It is one of the worst conflicts a family could ever encounter that may often result to withdrawal of attention and/or cold feet. This will also be the very reason for a member of the family to seek the attention he/she cannot get inside his/her kinfolks from other person/s or material things such as smartphones together with technology. Through continuous family communication, rejection tends to be eluded (Huffman, 2003).

It takes personal sacrifice to communicate when conditions are right for the other person. One must be willing to forego personal convenience to invest time in establishing a firm foundation for family communication. Trusting in family members by communicating with them will foster the love they share and tighten their bond (Ashton, 1976). Many families grow apart because each member is wrapped up in their individual lives, and they forget to come to home base to talk about the world around them. Even if problems do come up, if they have established a strong communicative base with their family, they will feel as though their family is a safe place to seek shelter. It takes time, commitment and discipline, but with mindful effort and practice, good communication becomes a habit, leading to loving and harmonious family communication (Hardy, n.d.).

A study entitled "Use of Social Networking Sites and Instant Messaging Does Not Lead to Increased Offline Social Network Size, or to Emotionally Closer Relationships with Offline Network Members" (Pollet, Dunbar & Robert, 2011) explained that social networks promote negative effects to interpersonal communication. This study aimed to determine if the various "layers" of social networks have something to do on how social sites affect "emotional closeness" in the offline relationship. By surveying one hundred seventeen (117) individuals ranging in age from eighteen (18) to sixty three (63) years old, they found out that spending time on instant messaging or IMs and social networking sites did not increase the emotional closeness of offline relationships. It also shows that personal communications are important in order to build a more intimate and close relationship specifically with one's family.

A study about how parents are the ones too distracted by these technologies explained how children are having a hard time striving to get their parents' attention. A psychologist named Catherine Steiner-Adair (2013) wrote a book entitled *"The Big Disconnect: Parenting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age"* where she interviewed over a hundred parents, teachers and children ages fourteen (14) to eighteen (18). She mentioned in her study how children are becoming stressed and frustrated competing with computer screens or iPhone displays. She also explained how adults find it hard to disengage themselves with the gadgets because of the feeling of urgency and excitement whenever they hear a beep from their gadgets. This gave her the idea of setting rules with her own family. She made it a point that she and her family have to put away all the gadgets during charging time. This made them capable of spending time with each other after work and school.

A study made by Dr. Jeffrey McQuillen (2013) warned that technology can be an interruption to interpersonal relationships. He mentioned how the beginning of internet made the world smaller with its pervasiveness but wider in terms of personal interaction and one-on-one relationships. There is a little chance to see familial interdependence if people will continue to leave their children alone with the internet. The more people do virtual interaction, the more disastrous family life would be.

Two statisticians named Sabatini and Saraccino (2014) examined how face-to-face communication and trust among others assess people's well-being more highly. By interviewing twenty four thousand (24,000) Italian household, they found out that social networks, though they allow people to communicate does not actually make them capable of doing face-to-face interaction and this may result in having trust issues. It is the trust that affects the well-being rather than the online interaction itself. They concluded that the overall effect of networking in an individual is significantly negative.

The family is the first social group to which an individual is exposed. It is a very close and intimate group wherein the most meaningful relationships are found. The family has the unique position of serving as a link between the individual and the larger society. It is so unique in providing continuity of social life and the meeting ground of generations not only in terms of biological traits but also of socio-cultural heritage. The family as a social group is universal and is a significant element in man's social life. The family exists because there is no other social unit which can fulfill the vital functions it performs for society (Medina, 1991). Keeping the doors of communication in the family open means establishing a good rapport between children and parents. It is impossible for a child to talk to parents who do not talk to each other. When parents do not share, they are not likely to share with their children or to build up a confidential relationship with them. (Zaide et al., 1968).

Synthesis:

Finding out more previous studies regarding this matter proves that social media, smart devices or simply the use of CMC to interact with people is already a well-known phenomenon. It is almost impossible to see anyone not owning a gadget and being connected to the internet. However, this study only focused on tightly knit families and applying it to these types of people will definitely lead them to a different perspective. CMC can be considered helpful and effective in a numerous ways; however, there are still instances where face-to-face interaction is still the gold standard in communication specifically when establishing a deeper relationship which, obviously works within a family.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the qualitative descriptive design that describes data and characteristics about a specific populations and/or a phenomenon. According to Lambert & Lambert (2012), qualitative descriptive studies tend to draw from naturalistic inquiry, which purports a commitment to study something in its natural state to the extent that is possible within the context of the research arena. Thus, there is no pre-selection of study variables, no manipulation of variables, and no prior commitment to any one's theoretical view of a target phenomenon. Although qualitative descriptive studies are different from the other qualitative research designs, it may also have some of the suggestions of the other approaches. In other words, a qualitative descriptive study may have grounded theory recommendations, because it uses constant comparative analysis when examining the projected data. So as to attain data needed in order to find out more about the study, participants were purposely selected, who best answered the research questions and enhanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. These participants were selected families from Cavite, namely Vargas Family, Corpuz Family and Badenas Family, all are a family of five living under the same roof with smart devices and stable internet connection. The number of participants is based on the data gathering procedure, which was Focus Group Discussion, used for this

study in order to describe the phenomenon. There were also four (4) experts who were interviewed in order to achieve credibility of the data gathered for this study, namely; Mr. Sonnie Santos & Ms. Janette Toral, both social media experts and; Ms. Malou Cervantes & Ms. Lillian Ng Gui, both life coaches.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Focus Group Discussion Results:

Social media has its role to each member of the family. It can be for entertainment, school, work, information or update purposes. It can also be used by the parents to track their children's location and activities. The usage of social media through smart devices all depends on the status of a person like a student, an employee or a house wife. For a student, the social media will provide with immediate access to information and communication with others. It is also used as an avenue for soft copy of lectures and assignments. For an employee, they will use it for work purposes like work assignments or jobs through email which is also considered as a social networking site. For example, contacting an investor for the company, people could use email and also video conference meetings using social networking sites like Skype. For housewives, they use it to communicate with their friends and relatives living far away from them, since they are always the ones who are at home. The youngest are actually the ones who are the most attached to social media that sometimes causes them to lose attention on themselves. Oftentimes, the reason why they are attached to social media is because they use it as an outlet for their emotions and thoughts which is supposed to be the role of their family; but, due to the lack of establishment of their relationship and communication, they are not able to open it up to each other. There are still families who are open to each other because they are able to build their relationship as the children are growing as well as the family. Some families talk to each other every day, because if they do not, they are afraid that they may lack connection to one another. So the children tend to share their feelings with their siblings but not with their parents because they feel like there is a limitation when it comes to their parents. They tend to choose certain topics they open up to their parents due to the lack of trust and awkwardness they feel. Family bonding time is very important for the family to maintain and possibly grow their relationship as a family. People have been living before without social media but because of the changes in this world, people need to adapt with this innovations. The families interviewed believe that they will still be fine and normal even if social media disappears but it will be hard because it provided people with a lot of things. It made communication and information very accessible. Social media will not be a barrier to family communication if it is used properly not like some of the people today that they lose focus on their responsibilities and forget the things that matters most because they are too occupied with their gadgets.

Expert Interview Results:

Social Media Expert Summary:

Social media does not only improve people's lives today but it has also become one of the most uncontrolled medium of communication. The danger focuses more on how people interact face-to-face. Although it helps to reach out with other people, there can still be a risk of miscommunication and lack of ability to communicate in person. Since almost everybody now has social media accounts, it became easier for them to broadcast and promote themselves and at the same time, to brag about even the simplest things. People are becoming too overwhelmed that they began losing focus of the most important things in their lives. They start failing in school. They would not talk to their family anymore. It will lose the value of close relationship and their sense of worth, can be as narrow as having too much likes on a specific post. It does not actually teach children what and what not to post and share on Facebook or Twitter and the more they overshare, the less private their lives become. Even though social media is taking over half of people's lives, they should never forget what is still important and what could give them more benefit as an individual. After all, social media can never replace physical presence.

Life Coach Summary:

Establishing family relationship may be the hardest thing to do especially in today's generation where everyone is getting busy minding their own lives especially when something that seems to be important and useful can also be a way to hinder in building this foundation in a family. Obviously, the growing technology of today has paved its way to the top and has helped a lot of people to make their lives easier. It is continuously evolving that it has invented a powerful tool not only for entertainment but also for reaching out as well. This has been one of the most powerful ways in order to unite

families together and that is social media. Many people began using this medium in order to reach out their loved ones abroad and also to keep in touch with the people in their lives. But because of the overgrowing innovation of technology, it became more and more accessible that even families in class C can now gain access to it.

Social media's being over accessibility also leads for it to have downsides. People become more dependent on it to the point that they would rather communicate through it even though they can possibly do it in person. Families are the ones who suffer the most in this phenomenon that instead of giving quality time to each other, they rather spend their day, being hooked online and share thoughts and opinions. Bottom line, while these people are busy online, they do not have even the slightest idea that their relationship is beginning to get weak due to lack of face-to-face communication. Moreover, the lack of face-to-face communication can also lead to poor face-to-face communication skills which can be very important once an individual starts working in his/her chosen field.

If people will know their limitations and priorities, social media would not be blamed as a barrier or hindrance to establish relationship. But since they are more engaged to it, it becomes negative and bad. But for as long as a family can still manage to support their rules and priorities and needs, even social media won't be a barrier.

5. CONCLUSION

This study started with three (3) main questions that the researchers wanted to answer, and these questions became the backbone of this exposition, better known as the statement of the problem. The statement of the problem was the main focus of the study and the researchers aimed to answer this study comes to the end. Here are the concluding phrases that address every problem stated in the first chapter. First problem is that, how do impersonal communication through social media access and smart devices affect family relationship and communication? Since the process of establishing a good relationship within a family is to provide time and effort, chances are impersonal communication may not fully build a good relationship towards a family. This was based from Mrs. Cervantes' opinion. The more the family members would spend time focusing in social media, their relationship will get weak and the tendency is that some members will seek attention from other sources, specifically social media where they can actually communicate and share their problems. Although social media may be a good tool of communication, it will still not work better when it comes to family aspects. Next is, how do social media access and smart devices satisfy users' physiological, social, and psychological needs that their families cannot fulfill? Some families or parents are not able to fulfill children's need and this result for them to rely on social media. According to Mr. Santos and Mrs. Toral, an individual needs a sense of belongingness or to at least become part of something big. Psychological in a sense that they post or share stuff on Facebook to feel a certain level of popularity and acceptance and when they gain likes, friend requests and interaction from other people. That is the time they feel they are being appreciated even only through social media. Lastly, how does social media access and smart devices become a barrier when it comes to family communication? Specifically, when families begin to forget their priorities with each other. This was explained by Mrs. Toral, one of the social media experts interviewed. When families started to lack time with each other and they fail to establish communication during the time that the children are growing up, and when the time comes they reach adulthood, they would look for other ways to share and express themselves. This may also result to a weak relationship. The lack of trust may also lead to certain instances where a person would rather share through social media than to his/her family.

By and large, social media becomes a barrier to family communication when it already takes the place of face-to-face communication. When it becomes a priority rather than a past time, it will eventually succumb all of the user's attention towards it to the extent that the user will become dependent on it. Since family is the basic unit of this society, all of a person's communication skills start from it and when communication within the family fails, a person will have a difficult time as well as communicating towards others. Maintaining a healthy family relationship and communication is a lot of work especially to those with a very busy lifestyle, but as per Mrs. Cervantes, it is not called a "work-life balance", it is more of a "work-life harmony".

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered as possible ways to improve this study; first, future researchers should also take into consideration the actual advantages of social media to family communication in order to weigh circumstances better; second, to further define communication and be as specific and as broad as possible. This may result to a broader

study, but it might result to something much better and more accurate; third, it would be much better if the number of participants and/or families to be interviewed would increase at least double (if not limited by the data gathering procedure specified in the study) to better understand the dilemma of each family member and to speak for a greater number of population; fourth, take into consideration the relationship of the family. Do not focus on communication. Again, it might result into a broader study, but it will definitely contribute more ideas not just to students but to the family as well; and fifth, for future researchers of a related study, try to dig deeper and find out points that were not tackled in this paper, but is still necessary for the betterment of the study.

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