

The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

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The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

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Abstract

Today, a mobile phone has asserted itself as a leading communication tool in most of our personal transactions and interactions. It has become a life simplifying and life changing mode of communication, influencing both public and private lives of people. Being a widely used tool for communication, a mobile phone touches most of the interpersonal cooperation and relationships in society, including marital interactions and relationships. Upon this, the present study, seeks to establish the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage and its influence on family happiness. The study unearths the pattern of mobile phone communication among married partners, by outlining the most common reasons for communicating with the spouse on a mobile phone. A survey was carried out with the help of questionnaires to obtain data from 30 respondents, comprising of married partners, staff and students from a state-owned university in Banjarmasin. Each of the respondents possessed a mobile phone. The Mann-Whitney test indicates that the males profoundly believed that mobile phone communication was more important to their marriage than females to strengthen their relationship. Also, the males reported a higher frequency of sending messages and calling their spouses. By and large, the results of the study illuminate on most common reasons for communicating with the spouse, and the outstanding reason is on maintaining a robust intimate relationship through keeping in touch, sharing updates, emotions, feelings, knowing about children and ensuring the safety of each other through checking on one another using a mobile phone. The findings have significance in showing the need for continued communication in a marital relationship, especially by using the fastest and most comfortable means of mobile phone. Given the synchronous nature of mobile phone communication, the results indicate that married spouses cannot do without it, especially in this Information Society, where we need updates from our spouses, children, friends, and the situation at large.

Keywords: Mobile phone; marital communication; interpersonal relationships

Introduction

A mobile phone as one of the present-day modern tools of communication, has positioned itself as a new form of human invention (Macwan, 2017) that has become an inseparable part of the day today's human connecting and interaction tool. Its discovery has led to a dramatic change in the way people communicate, browse the internet, navigate the universe, perform at work and conduct themselves (Duke and Montag, 2017; Macwan, 2017) both in private and public. Mobile phone use in the married couples has dramatically increased over time and significantly influencing most of the marital affairs (Zhang, Cheng, Wei and Gong, 2018) leading to improved communication and sustainability of a family.

Though there are studies revealing that the use of mobile phones among married couples has become one source of depression in families, Dietmar (2003) points out that among the many advantages of mobile phone communication, is improving communication regarding the specific needs of couples, hence leading to happiness and satisfaction in a marriage. Communication being practical all the time, through mobile phone, people in a marital relationship can easily exchange information, express feelings and schedule programs, including family outings and entertainment together, hence becoming a more sufficient and easy relationship strengthening tool man has ever invented (Wood and Smith, 2001).

This tool (mobile phone) has become a necessity in human interactions, relationships and connections, turning out to be part of society's daily mode of communication throughout the world (Zulkefly and Baharudin, 2009) including to the married couples. Just like to people from the other parts of the world, Indonesians have increasingly adopted the use of mobile phones, with a prediction of over 193.4 million people as users (SRD, 2015) and a total number estimated to be 81.87 million smartphones users across the archipelago, the country is said to be the fourth biggest phone user in the world (Müller, 2020) and with its large number of people working outside the country more so in the informal sector, mobile communication is a vital means of family connection between couples.

Being a fourth populated country in the world after the United States of America, India and China, Indonesia has a big population using mobile phones (SRD, 2015). The number of users has surpassed all the Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia Investments, 2016), reported to be 193.4 million people by 2019 (SRD, 2015). Indonesia's the third Hand phones (HPs) as usually pronounced, have turned to be an indispensable means of communication across ages, including married couples. According to Lavner, Karney and Bradbury (2016) communication is of vital importance in a relationship. The different modes of communication in the varying relationship models create intimate bonds which are believed to remain strong even among couples who are sensitive (Lavner, Karney and Bradbury, 2016). The different features found on a mobile phone, support varying operating systems which encourage even long-distance relationships and also encourage partners to write romantic and enticing messages (Supriani and Iqbal, 2019).

The increased use of mobile phones for communication amongst married couples in Indonesia is on the rise due to the belief that love, intimacy and good working cooperation which is based on intensive communication among married couples influences happiness in the family. This paper aims to describe the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage and its influence on family happiness. The study unearths the patterns of mobile phone communication among married partners, by outlining the most common reasons for communication between spouse via a mobile phone.

Communication is believed to be a fundamental factor in building an excellent relationship between married partners in a family (Renanita and Setiawan, 2018). According to Luong, Charles and Fingerman (2011) a couple's good interpersonal relationship fosters better mental wellbeing of people in a marriage. Because a good communication fosters mutual cooperation and understanding between partners (Olson, Olson-Sigg and Larson, 2008; Renanita and Setiawan, 2018). In a study by Sanjaya and Putra (2016) it was established that in a marriage, communication and sexuality, influence the quality of relationships. They further established that communication variable and the partner's sexual intercourse satisfaction influence happiness in a marriage by 58.1%, while 41.9% is influenced by other factors (Sanjaya and Putra, 2016), hence concluding that relationships and happiness in the family are greatly influenced by both communication and sexual satisfaction. **Upon this, the present study is unique, in the sense that, it looks at patterns of communication among partners via**

The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

mobile phone and how the said communication patterns influence the married people's relationships and happiness in the family.

Theoretical Review

Currently, with today's increasingly competitive, complex and challenging life activities, both couples under engagement and married ones have resorted to mobile phone for romantic relationships, hence making it an integral part of effective communication in a harmonious relationship between spouses. This form of communication is deemed the cheapest and easiest way, partners can keep in touch while at work or entangled in other separate activities. Through mobile phone communication, partners can engage one another in a discussion, negotiations, and able to make consultations on issues which need joint decisions from both parties. Quality communication is an integral part of a relationship (Juhasz and Bradford, 2016).

In a relationship, mobile phones play an important role, making it emerge as the main reason for most text messages and phone calls (Faulkner and Culwin, 2005; Thurlow, 2003; Juhasz and Bradford, 2016). According to Faulkner and Culwin (2005) due to the vital role SMS and text messaging play in a relationship, it has become a growing academic aspect in the field of communication studies. This is coupled with a dramatic increase in the use of mobile phones and mobile Internet, with its growing positive effect on majority people, hence capturing the growing attention from communication scholarship (Zhang, Cheng, Wei and Gong, 2018). It has led to many epistemological questions regarding the use of mobile phone technology by modern communication researchers concerned with increasing reliance on technological communication something which has also resulted into weakened social ties (Chesley, 2010; Fischer, 1992) in some relationships.

Such discussions and debates continue to dominate research on mobile phone communication (Juhasz and Bradford, 2016), SMS and texting messaging (Faulkner and Culwin, 2005), leading to the investigation and examining of technological communication influence on the social network make-up in communication. In a social network make-up perspective, usually support of social relationships is reported to enhances the people's ability of connection through direct communication with one another (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman and Rainie, 2006; Haythornthwaite, 2005), thus encouraging cooperation. Human cooperation is an integral component of human nature, deeply established in our social settings, including the daily activities (Slocombe and Seed, 2019; Rosita, Nurhayati, Jumiati, Rosmiati, Abdu, 2020).

Regarding the human nature, social media interaction popularized via mobile phones and mobile internet have emerged as the most common media for interpersonal relationships. The human race considers communication as a life blood of the very existence of human nature (Subramanian, 2017). According to a study on mobile phone communication, there has been a tremendous increase in its use for years (Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Katz, 2003; Craig, 2007) throughout the globe. Jin (2007) notes that this increase is based on the fact that mobile communication possesses similar features with the direct face to face interactions. Research has established that er found out that higher amounts of both mobile and face-to-face were negatively associated with loneliness. Also, individuals in romantic relationships used mobile phones significantly more often than those not romantically involved (Jin, 2007).

This is in the way of connecting with family, romantic couples, and friends. Thus, it can be argued that through mobile phone communication, people can strengthen their family bonds, facilitate friendships, and build mutual support.

Other studies suggest that individuals who communicate through multiple media such as cell phones and emails have stronger family relationships than those who communicate only face to face

(Haythornthwaite, 2005). One study focused on ICT use and family relationships and found that technology enables a type of family connectedness that revolves around cell phone use and shared Internet experiences (Kennedy et al., 2008; Chen et al, 2017).

Relatively, the above studies did not thoroughly examine the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage but looked at the aspect of those partners still dating but not yet married (Dietmar, 2003). The study results on mobile communication among married partners could differ from those of the partners in the dating process. This is given the attachment styles and intimacy that develops via marital relationship. Thus, the present study investigated how mobile phone communication supports the marriage relationship by addressing and answering the questions related to this study. To find out the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage. The researcher, therefore, wanted to investigate how mobile phone communication supports the marital relationship.

Significance of the study

The present study will illuminate the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage. Thus, the married partners who had been reluctant to use phones to communicate with their spouses will be inspired to adopt this new technology, leading to improved marital relationships via communication. It will also add to the existing literature on mobile phone studies, which could be used as a reference for future studies.

Theoretical framework

The Attachment theory guides this study. It was extended to adult romantic relationships in the late 1980s by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver. Within Attachment theory, the attachment means an affectional bond or tie between an individual and an attachment figure (usually a caregiver). Therefore, for the case of married partners, each spouse is an attachment figure of the other, and this can be noticed in the way they relate and communicate with one another.

A marital relationship is significantly influenced by the nature of the attachment between the two partners; the “attachment style” of the two partners and its combination plays a decisive role. According to Bartholomew (1991), Hazan and Shaver (1987) as also cited in Boraie and Jorge (2010) and following the concept of the internal working model of close attachments, four adult attachment styles can be distinguished, i.e., secure, fearful, possessive, dismissing), depending on how positive or negative one's image of oneself and the partner is. A person with a confident attachment style has a positive self-image as well as a positive image of the partner so that a stable and trustful relationship can ensue. The other three attachment styles can be characterized as insecure types, in which the degree of insecurity reaches different magnitudes (West et al, 1994). A fearfully attached person, for instance, has both a negative self-image and a negative image of the partner, so that the relationship is plagued by constant insecurity. A negative self-image distinguishes the possessive type but a positive image of the partner, leading to a great fear of loss. On the other hand, the dismissing type has a positive self-image and a negative image of the partner, leading to a great emphasis on independence and distance.

The influence of attachment style can be postulated in all levels of the relationship, hence exerts a significant impact on the communication between the partners. For instance, it has been empirically demonstrated that securely attached persons relate more frequently and intimately with their partners than dismissing attachment types. It is assumed that attachment style also influences mobile communication in couple relationships. Being reachable independent of time and location, for instance, is an inherent technical feature of mobile communication. However, it must be implemented concerning the partner (partner taking the cell phone with him/her, turning it on, answering calls). The

The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

attachment theory guides the present study to explain the importance of mobile phone and marital communication.

Attachment theories used to explain the behavior of adults in their life situations. Attachment situations are often characterized by long periods of separation, lack of proximity, stress, and fear. In such circumstances, adults display attachment behavior; they seek to support and be intimate with one another via mobile phone communication (Chin, et al, 2019). However, many questions are raised, for instance: how is attachment behavior expressed via the media of mobile communication? What is the significance, especially of mobile communication via mobile telephone, which allows nearly unlimited reachability? What media do partners use to seek this intimacy and support, and why? The manner of achieving this presumably depends on the person's attachment style and the representation of the relationship and the partner; in other words, it is likely to depend on the internal working model based on the self-image and image of the partner.

Katz and Aakhus (2002) argue that, across cultures, people use communication tools in ways that maximize their needs and comforts, often resulting in the invention of new ways people interact. Similarly, Licoppe (2004) demonstrated that mobile technology's advent enabled us to develop a particular communication pattern in close relationships, referred to as the 'connected mode of communication.'

Methodology

In this study, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire to collect the data. The respondents were married partners, staff, or students in one of the state-owned universities found in South Kalimantan. The thirty questionnaires were distributed, and all returned for data analysis. Data was analyzed using SPSS Windows Version 17 for both descriptive and inferential statistics. All the participants possessed a mobile phone. The sample size was 30 respondents.

A demographic profile shows the study samples categorized by gender, age group, nationality, a period in marriage, the physical distance of marriage, and the period of using a mobile phone in marriage. The male respondents were 50 percent, likewise the females (50%). Internationals accounted for the highest number of respondents (70%); the age-group of 26-32 years old reported the highest percentage of 53.3, followed by (33 years & above) with 40 percent and 19-25 years with 6.7 percent. In terms of the period in marriage, the spouses with 1-3 years dominated the sample with 40 percent, followed by (more than seven years) with 33.3 percent. Spouses staying together accounted for 60 percent, while those in long-distance relationships recorded 40 percent. Spouses who have used the mobile phone for 1-3 years reported a higher percentage of 43.3 compared to others.

Measures

Marital mobile communication was measured through 16-items. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement to the statements using a 4-point Likert scale, i.e., 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree (see appendix).

The researcher also measured the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage through three questions. One of them, "Is mobile phone communication important to your marriage?" The respondents had to indicate the level of importance ranging from 'extremely important to not at all important.' The second question was, "do you think it is vital that each married spouse have a mobile phone to communicate with one another?"

To find answers to the pattern of mobile phone communication among married partners, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate the frequency of sending messages and calling spouses in a day. The researcher also asked the participants to answer the rate of their spouses, calling them, and

receiving messages. They also had to indicate the kind of messages they usually send and receive from their spouses. Examples of the questions for this section were;

- “On an average day, how many times do you send messages to your spouse?” The respondents had to respond on 1= None, 2 = 1-2 times, 3 = 3-4 times, 4 = More than 5 times.
- On an average day, how many times does your spouse send you messages?
- On an average day, how many times does your spouse call you?

Still, under the same section, the questionnaire required participants to mention who often initiates the first mobile phone communication, either yourself or your spouse.

For the researcher to tap the respondents' responses to the reasons for mobile phone communication in marriage, an open-ended question was asked last in the questionnaire. The respondents were free to answer/state the reasons they deemed fit. The respondents had to report any five common reasons for communicating with a spouse on a mobile phone.

Findings and discussion

Marital mobile communication

The researcher analyzed the data using the 2-independent samples Mann-Whitney U (non-parametric) test (McKnight and Najab, 2010) and found that there were significant differences between male and female spouses about how mobile phone communication supports their marriage. The female had a higher mean rank of 19.83, the male had a mean rank of 11.17, and the p-value of 0.007 was significant. The Z-test was 2.708.

When the researcher analyzed through Cross tabulation, the female agreed to most of the items measuring marital mobile phone communication, unlike the male who strongly disagreed on some issues. On an item, whether one cannot do without a mobile phone, 46 percent of females strongly agreed that they could not do without a mobile phone. In comparison, 20 percent of males strongly agreed. On the other hand, 60 percent of males ‘agreed’ that they cannot do without a mobile phone, while 46.7 percent of females agreed.

Importance of mobile phone communication in marriage

The Mann-Whitney test indicated that the male had a higher mean rank of 18.47; the females had 12.53. Therefore, the males profoundly believed that mobile phone communication was essential to their marriage, strengthening the relationship. The p-value of 0.059 was not significant, so there were no significant differences between male and female spouses concerning the importance of mobile phone communication in marriage. The Z-test of 1.891 was also not significant.

Frequency and use of mobile phone

Still, the Cross-Tabulation results showed that the males (husbands) had a 60 percent frequency of sending messages to their wives in 1-2 times a day. The females reported 53.3 percent in 1-2 times a day. However, the p-value of 0.409 was not significant. About receiving messages, the females reported 46.7 percent within 3-4 times a day. The males had 40 percent within 3-4 times in a day.

On the number of times the spouses call each other, the males accounted for 73.3 percent in 1-2 times a day while the females had 66.7 percent in 1-2 times a day. On the frequency of receiving calls from a spouse, the females reported 66.7 percent, and the males had 53.3 percent in 1-2 times a day.

Kind of messages sent to spouse

It was found that 80 percent of females send ‘I love you’ to their spouses from cross tabs. The males reported 46 percent of sending ‘I love you’ to their spouses. Concerning ‘where are you?’ message, the males accounted for 53.3 percent while the females reported 46.7 percent.

The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

The females also reported 60 percent, and the males had 46.7 percent on 'how are you?' message. The males had 13.3 percent, and females reported 6.7 percent on 'who are you with?' The females had 46.7 percent, and the males had 40 percent of the message when they came home. The message of 'why didn't you return my call, and the males reported 20 percent likewise the females. On the other messages, the female scored 40 percent, which includes thinking about you, how is work? How are the studies? Have you eaten well? The male scored 20 percent on other messages where they mentioned messages like, how are the children? What is the bill at home? What are you doing?

Kind of messages received from a spouse

The results of cross-tabulation indicated that the females received 80 percent of I love your messages from their spouses. The male received 66.7 percent in this regard. Still, for 'where are your message,' the males reported 53.3 percent while the females had 33.3 percent. On I miss your message; the females said 73.3 percent and the male's 53.3 percent. The females still reported a higher percentage (60%) on 'how are you' while the males had 40 percent.

Reasons for mobile phone communication in marriage

The respondents' reasons for communicating with a spouse using a mobile phone could be summed as; keeping up with updates, sharing feelings and emotions, strengthening the relationship, knowing about the children, keeping closer, sharing each other's problems and difficulties, e.g., about studies, it is the easiest way to communicate (you can get immediate feedback). Seeking attention and responding to others' care is an essential means of maintaining relationships. The mobile phone comes in handy as a crucial tool for managing attention (Birnholtz, 2017). This could be explained by the synchronous nature of the mobile phone, where you can get instant feedback through calling and messaging unless some one's phone is off.

Most respondents mentioned that they keep close to one another, know what is happening, and get updates through mobile phones, especially for spouses in a long-distance relationship. For this study, the reasons are outlined in the following ways as answered in the questionnaire;

- 'It keeps us close. It strengthens our marriage by knowing the worries and fears of another, for a better understanding of each other, especially for long-distance relationships. In case of any urgent issues, the mobile phone is easier'.
- 'The easiest way for communicating when apart. It is efficient, especially when you call, then you get an immediate answer then email if one is not on the net. That is what most people use, so I use also'.
- 'It seems like he is nearby me, so I do not feel lonely. I am eager to know every time, anywhere about him, especially when I miss him'.
- 'Sharing any interesting news while we are not together. Inform the important thing that I forgot to tell him when we were at home. To tell any urgent issues. To strengthen our marital relationship. To tell him that he is so important in my life'.
- 'We are both foreigners in the same country; we need to ensure each other's safety most of the time. He works for Glass Company, so he goes from one project to another in one day. He was involved in 2 work-related accidents in one year. When the kids get sick, I always need him to accompany me. Almost every day, we go home together'.
- 'To interact with each other, share feelings and emotions, and share problems when the married are staying in different countries. To get information about each other and reduce uncertainty. Keep updated about each other'.

- 'Missing him. I want to share my feelings. I was asking him about life. Release my loneliness. Encourage him in his study'.
- 'To ask permission if I want to go out somewhere, to reassure him that I love him every day and to make each other feel connected.'
- 'To check on each other and to strengthen our love and need for each other.'
- I am sharing the moments of sadness and happiness, asking him to do something for me like buying goods, etc.
- 'To know about the general condition of children, the bill at home, to know where she is, and I pick her, delivering things home, tell her that I am coming home.'
- 'Consultation on different issues.'
- 'Mobile communication is cheap, flexible, simple, easy, and very fast.'

The above findings are partly in line with the results of Knobloch and Solomon (2002), who found that mobile communication promotes feelings of closeness between partners leading them to achieve desired outcomes such as commitment to one another.

Some respondents did not bother to answer the open-ended question on the reasons for mobile phone communication in marriage. However, the researcher had given them ample time to complete the questionnaire, but even when the researcher cross-checked on receiving the filled questionnaire and found that the last questionnaire was not answered, some declined to answer it. The diverse opinions regarding this question could have helped the researcher to uncover the prudent issues on why married partners communicate using a mobile phone.

Another limitation is the small sample size of 30 respondents. It is hard to generalize the findings of this study on such a small sample. A clear conclusion cannot be drawn, and thus future research can replicate the same study by using a more representative sample. However, we cannot rule out the importance of this study on adding to the available literature on mobile phone communication.

Conclusion

The results have significance in showing the need for continued communication in a marital relationship, especially by using the fastest and most comfortable means of mobile phone. The research questions for this study are answered by finding out how mobile phone communication supports the marital relationship.

The results indicate that the married spouses cannot do without mobile phone communication, especially in this information society, where we need updates from our spouses, children, friends, and the situation at large.

By and large, the results of the study illuminate on most common reasons for communicating with a spouse. The outstanding reason is on maintaining a strong intimate relationship through keeping in touch, sharing updates, emotions, feelings, knowing about children, and ensuring the safety of each other through checking on one another by using a mobile phone. Though the mobile phone is machine-assisted interpersonal communication, there is building a secure link (close relationship) like when you hear a voice of your spouse, it feels like he or she is part of you and this can keep the relationship going even though you may be far from one another like when you are staying in different states or countries. The results indicate that the males call and send messages to their spouses more frequently than females. They also give higher importance to mobile phone communication in marriage more than females.

The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

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The Mobile Phone and Marital Communication: Its Influence on Family Happiness in Indonesia

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