

Mobile Phone Usage and Family Relationship among Selected Students in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent to which use of smart phone influences interpersonal relationship between parents and their adolescent children. Using students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, as respondents. Sample for the study was selected through convenience sampling method. The sample size for the study was one hundred and eighteen (118). Questionnaire was the main source of data collection. The findings revealed that the respondents placed more value on their social interaction with their parents and would not permit the use of smart phone to substitute the need for social connection with their parents and family members. The assumption that young people tend to be obsessed with their smart phones to a degree that such would become a substitute to face-to-face human interaction is thus dismissed.

Keywords: Media, Interaction, Smart phones, Family relationship, Sibling relationship.

Introduction

Family relationships thrive with regular interaction. Where family members do not have adequate time for productive interaction, hardly will there be growth in depth and breadth of their relationship. The 21st century experience where, human interaction with digital communication device provides a sense of companionship, challenges the traditional ways of family interaction. For instance, face to face communication could be substituted with interaction with one's handset or online interaction or social media interaction, grossly vitiating the time for human interaction. Should humans derive equivalent pleasure from contact with communication gadgets, there may be competition for more time with face-to-face interactions among family members.

Communication technology aids social interaction, no doubt. A case in point is the degree of companionship that playing game with one's handset or interacting on social media platforms provides. Because of suitability and comfort that communication technology brings, one wonders if *people time* is not gradually giving way to *screen time*. Within the spectrum of this paper, screen time is referred to as time spent playing online

games, interacting with friends on social media platforms provided through mobile phone and doing a variety of online activities, while *people time* is the time spent having face to face communication with family members. With the advent of mobile phone, and especially, android phones, time for face-to-face interaction seems to be pitted against time for operating the device.

The mobile phone is a fast-diffusing technology in the world today with over 2 billion users in 2005 (Chan, 2013). South Africa, for instance, has an approximately 91% of adult users of mobile phone, while Nigeria has about 80 % adult users. Mobile phone with its social and communication utilities contribute to prosperity in commerce and economy of developing world. It has expanded market for business owners as well as given organization performance a face lift. Excuses for delay in relaying messages is no longer tenable in modern business communication because of impact of mobile phone technology on business progress. Furthermore, consequences of disaster have been minimized by possibility for rapid response enabled by the use of mobile phone. In spite of these advantages, scholars have wondered at the influence of the use of mobile phones on social interaction and relationship. This is perhaps premised on the fact that other technologies such as television, radio as well as the internet came with enormous influence on traditional structure of human communication---and perhaps altered it.

Mobile phones, especially smart phones or android phones, are not only used for communication purposes, but as a hybrid technology, they provide other forms of entertainment. This includes, but not limited to: downloading Apps, sending short messages, and browsing the internet, searching social network sites, taking photos, and doing a host of other activities which give pleasure to the user while on the move. Because of its entertaining features and applications, one can stay connected with friends and family members separated by distance. It is also a medium to pass time by watching one's favourite TV programmes or playing digital games. These entertaining possibilities endear the youths and pleasure-seekers to the mobile phone. However, excessive use of mobile phone raises a concern in relation to face to face interaction with family members not distanced by time and space.

Uses of Mobile Phone and Face-to-Face Interaction

Users of mobile phone engage applications on their phones to meet different needs---for example, online games provide users with entertainment. These games can be engaging and obsessive. It is observed that game players spent huge amount of time playing and forming relationship with virtual characters and that players that spent huge time in the game environment may have difficulty forming relationship in real life (Petes & Malesky, 2008). Users consider the relationship formed online as much safer than the one formed in real life (Uz & Cagitay, 2019). The use of smart mobile phone is observed to lower the quality of face-to-face communication when brought in by either party involved in interpersonal communication (Vaidya, Pathal & Vaidya, 2016). In a study conducted by Misra, Cheng, Genevie and Yuan (2014), participants who held a mobile phone on the table, while having face to face conversation reported less fulfilment than participants who had the conversation without the presence of mobile phones (Vaidya et al, 2016).

Furthermore, naturalistic field experiment conducted by Misra, Cheng, Genevieve and Yuan (2014) revealed that conversations without the presence of mobile phone is regarded as significantly superior compared with those without the absence of it. It can thus be deduced that productive interpersonal communication thrives on face-to-face interaction, devoid of any form of distraction. Any form of distraction, either from external noise or through intermittent receiving of phone calls can interfere with interpersonal communication with family members. Depending on the outcome of interpersonal communication at stake, such distraction can mean lack of commitment to and interest in family relationship or family matters. Family members thus become bothered when one of them prefers using mobile phone as toy, while engaging in face-to-face conversation. Drago (2015) noted that family members can think that their conversation is degraded when one is conversing while playing with mobile phone.

Elsobeihi and Naser (2000) examined the relationship between mobile technology use and the ability of people to communicate face to face and how the use of this technology affects the quality and quantity of face-to-face communication. Of the 120 respondents, 74% agreed that they use their mobile phones or tablets while spending time with friends or family; 49.1% agreed that they communicate more frequently with family and friends via technology than face to face communication, 58% agreed that it bothered them when friends and family members use technology while spending time with them; 76.7% agreed that the presence of technology while spending time with others affects face to face communication negatively. Of the 120 respondents, 94(78.3%) agreed that they noticed a degradation in the quality of their conversations with others when technology is present or used. This study thus provides evidence suggesting a negative influence of mobile phone use on face- to- face interpersonal communication of family members.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory

The phone or handset has changed the way Nigerians communicate since its inception around the year 2000. With new modifications for each brand, mobile phones could provide a number of gratifications apart from the communication purposes they are meant to serve. Uses and gratifications theory posits that users of mass media are active users, in this case, mobile phone technology users, who approach it in order to meet a wide spectrum of needs. Uses and gratifications scholars have developed some typologies of gratifications derived from the use of communication media, ranging from information, personality, integration and social interaction, to entertainment. The need for social integration, which is one of human needs, is met by mobile phone technology. With the mobile phone or android phones, the barrier of time and space is eroded; people can easily meet and make new friends on social media on their mobile phones.

Thus, the barrier that limits the scope and number of friends one can have has been completely obliterated by the use of mobile phones---however, one must note that with such possibility to form and expand the circle of one's friends comes the tension to keep the line of communication open with family members who are physically present with users. Through uses and gratifications theory, one can speculate that the cardinal purpose for obsession with mobile phone by users, especially the young people, is the

entertainment and social connectedness. Tension is created when the desire to keep virtual social interaction alive and ongoing competes with the time required to keep the life of family relationship active. The question arising from the review of uses and gratifications theory is a matter of contextualization. Based on different contexts, the use of communication technology may be different and so are the challenges they pose socially. Applying the assumption of the social integration of uses and gratifications theory could offer material to theorize the reason for valuing the online social connection over the social connection formed via face-to-face interaction.

Statement of the Problem

Using mobile phone influences the flow of conversation in face-to-face human interactions. However, whether such interruptions positively or negatively influence the quality of family relationship is worth investigating. The uses and gratifications theory suggests that any media communication technology, such as mobile phone, is capable of meeting the social interaction needs of man. It is therefore assumed that obsession with mobile phone can have influence on interpersonal relationship with people. Thus, there is need to examine the extent to which the use of mobile phone influences the need for social interactions between parents and children. This study will examine the extent to which the use of mobile phone by young people influences their relationship with family members. Therefore, the article specifically seeks to find out 1. to what extent does the use of mobile phone influence the quality of relationship between young people and their parents? 2. to what extent does the use of mobile phone influence the quality of relationship between young people and their siblings?

Methodology

The method of research is survey. One hundred and eighteen students from Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, constituted the sample size and were selected through the convenience sampling technique. The instrument of data collection is questionnaire. Data were analysed using frequency count and percentages.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Age of respondents

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
20-25	97	8.2
26-30	20	16.9
Void	1	0.8
Total	118	100

Table 2: Sex of respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	42	35.6
Female	75	63.6
Void	1	0.8
Total	118	100

Data presented in Tables 1 and 2 indicated that majority of the respondents are female between the ages of 20 and 25. This category of people are in their years of activeness and being female makes it very likely that they are active users of handsets for social connection. Young ladies use their handsets to operate different social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook where they connect with new friends and sustain social connection with loved ones. These social media come with different features that allow for online social interactions that sometimes take away the time and energy of those who operate them. Since majority of the respondents are female, there is no doubt about their love for social connection and interaction. However, it is not certain whether or not social bond formed on social media through gadgets of media communication attracts more or less attention when compared with social ties with parents and siblings. Answer to research question one gives a clue to that.

Research Question One: To what extent does the use of mobile phone influence the quality of relationship between young people and their parents? This research question seeks to find the extent to which mobile phone applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp constitute a barrier to effective interpersonal relationship between young people and their juvenile children.

Table 3: The extent to which respondents' use of mobile phone influences relationship with parents

	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I spend more time on my phone than I do with my parents	42(35.6%)	45(38.1%)	11(9.3)	13(11.0)	7(5.9%)
2	I give attention to my phone during conversation with parents	12(10.2%)	16(13.6%)	22(18.6%)	48(40.7%)	20(16.9%)
3	I prefer to discuss personal matters with people online than talking about it with my parents	12(10.2%)	17(14.4%)	13(11.0%)	38(32.2%)	38(32.2%)
4	Using my phone gives me much happiness than spending time with my parents	8(6.8%)	25(21.2%)	19(16.1%)	36(30.5%)	30(25.4%)

SA=Strongly Agreed; A=Agreed; N=Neutral; D=Disagreed; SD=Strongly disagreed.

Table 3 indicates that majority of the respondents spend more time with their phones than with their parents. The respondents are university students who, due to academic

engagement, are not always at home with their parents---and due to many free times at their disposal, tend to spend more time operating their handsets. It can also be deduced from the data that majority of the respondents do not give attention to their phones when having conversations with their parents. It implies further that even if their phones ring during a conversation with their parents, they prefer to shut off the call to permit an uninterrupted atmosphere of with their parents. This inference may be based on the philosophy of respect for one's parents which is rooted in traditional Yoruba families. Within that context, it is disrespectful for a child to be distracted when his or her parents are having a conversation with her or him. Majority of the respondents also would not discuss personal matters with people they meet and interact with online. Rather, they would discuss matters of their private lives with their parents. The value placed on relationship with parents is indicative of the value placed on the relationship with parents as source of happiness as compared with the gratifications derived from interaction with handsets.

Research Question Two: To what extent does the use of mobile phone influence the quality of relationship between young people and their siblings?

Table 4: The extent to which respondents' use of mobile phone influences quality relationship with siblings.

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I spend more time on my phone than I do with my siblings	28(23.7%)	37(31.4%)	15(12.7%)	15(22.7%)	11(9.3%)
2	I give attention to my phone during conversation with siblings	24(20.3%)	25(21.2%)	22(18.6%)	33(28.0%)	14(11.9%)
3	I prefer to discuss personal matters with people online than talking about it with my siblings.	12(10.2%)	14(11.9%)	13(11.0%)	46(39.0%)	33(28.0%)
4	Using my phone gives me much happiness than spending time with my siblings	12(10.2%)	9(7.6%)	17(14.4%)	52(44.1%)	28(23.7%)

SA=Strongly Agreed; A=Agreed; N=Neutral; D=Disagreed; SD=Strongly disagreed.

Table 4 indicates that the depth of relationship that the respondents have with their siblings. It also shows the role of handset use in interpersonal relationship with siblings. As indicated, majority of the respondents spend more time on phone than they did with siblings. This may be due to satisfactions derived from working through pleasure-giving applications on their handset. However, the difference between those who will give attention to their phone rather than concentrate on their siblings in interpersonal communication context and those who will do the exact opposite is somewhat slim. Furthermore, majority of the respondents will not disclose personal matters to strangers or even people they know online. This inference is further validated with a majority of the respondents indicating that much of their happiness comes from spending time with their siblings as opposed to spending time operating their handsets.

Young people who use telephone devices for a number of purposes which specifically include entertainment. The study has sought to unravel whether or not the need for personal entertainment reduces the need for social connection among siblings and between young people and their parents. From data presented in Table 4, one can infer that, while young people like to indulge their handsets to explore various entertaining-giving components on their handsets, the need for face-to-face interpersonal relationship with siblings is not in any way undermined by it. In other words, the use of smart phones does not inhibit young people's need for face-to-face interaction with siblings.

Conclusion

This study concludes that young people place priority on face-to-face interpersonal communication with parents and siblings over a substitute of online interactions through pleasure-providing applications on mobile phones. Young people thus seem to place premium on *people time* over *screen time*. Although one cannot deny the pleasure that working through the applications on the smart phones offers, especially at one's low and lonely moments, the study stresses the importance of face-to-face interpersonal communication among family members. The use of smart phone while trying to have conversation with family members makes the conversation inconsequential. Thus, young people tend to put their cell phones aside when having interaction with their parents. It appears the satisfaction derived from communication technology device will not replace the gratifications of having one on one, face to face interaction with family members, albeit siblings or parents. Furthermore, this study is in agreement with Vaidya et al (2016) which suggests that the use of smart phones lowers the quality of face-to-face communication. The findings in this study affirm the tenet of Uses and Gratifications theory on the use of media technology for pleasure, but extent discussion on "pleasure" usage of technology by asserting that the need for entertainment has its limits when it comes to relationships that are central to the lives of young people. However, it is observed that there is no tension in the gratifications sought by the use of smart phones and the need to maintain face to face interpersonal communication with family members among young people.

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