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The Impact of Technology on Family Communication

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the impact of technology on family communication patterns using the Family Communication Patterns Theory approach. Technology, especially digital devices such as mobile phones and social media, has changed the way families communicate, both positively and negatively. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach in five families in an urban area to understand how technology affects interpersonal relationships between family members. The results show that families with a high conversation orientation tend to use technology to strengthen emotional connectedness, while families with a high conformity orientation are more cautious in using technology, because they are worried about its impact on traditional values and parental control. Technology is also found to play a role in resolving family conflicts, but in some cases, it causes technofence or disruption in face-to-face communication. In conclusion, technology provides opportunities and challenges in maintaining family relationships, and its use needs to be regulated wisely to avoid negative impacts. This study suggests that families should be more aware of the limitations of technology use and prioritize direct interaction to maintain the quality of interpersonal communication.

Keywords: Technology, Family Communication, Interpersonal Relationships.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology has developed rapidly in recent decades, bringing significant changes in various aspects of human life, including family dynamics (Galvin, Braithwaite, and Bylund 2015). Devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and increasingly easy internet access have enabled interactions across time and place. Although technology offers ease of communication, excessive or unwise use can also have a negative impact on the quality of interpersonal interactions, especially in the context of family communication (Mann 2016). Family communication is an important aspect in building harmonious relationships and supporting the emotional well-being of each member (Pramono 2020). Before the era of digital technology, interactions between family members usually took place in intense face-to-face situations, such as during meals together or casual conversations at home. However, with the presence of technology, these interaction patterns have changed significantly. Many family members, especially the younger generation, interact more often through electronic devices than through direct communication (McDaniel and Coyne 2016; Sillars, Canary, and Tafoya 2003). This phenomenon raises concerns that technology can reduce the quality of face-to-face communication, isolate individuals within the family, or even cause tension and conflict (Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011). On the other hand, technology can also facilitate more efficient and continuous communication between family members who may be geographically distant, allowing family relationships to remain close despite distance (Katz and Aakhus 2002). This study aims to explore more deeply how technology affects communication within families, both



positively and negatively, and to understand the role of technology in interpersonal relationships between family members. In the context of Indonesian culture, which highly values family and social interaction, the impact of technology on family communication is a relevant and urgent topic to study. Traditionally, families in Indonesia are seen as strong social units, where communication and interaction between family members are prioritized (Ramadhana et al. 2022). Gathering moments such as dinners, religious activities, and family events are important spaces for building intimacy and harmony. However, with the increasing use of digital technology, there have been significant changes in communication patterns and family relationships. Technological devices that were originally designed to facilitate communication, now often give rise to "communication paradoxes" (Boyd 2014). On the one hand, families can more easily connect virtually despite physical distance, especially with the advent of social media, instant messaging apps, and video calls. On the other hand, this increased accessibility often replaces face-to-face communication with shallower and more limited digital interactions. The influence of technology on family communication can also be seen in the context of generational differences. Older generations generally grew up in environments without sophisticated technology, so their communication patterns tend to be more based on direct interaction. Meanwhile, the younger generation, especially millennials and generation Z, are more accustomed to digital devices and often feel more comfortable communicating through technological media. This imbalance has the potential to create a communication gap between generations in a family, which can ultimately affect the quality of emotional relationships and family intimacy.

Furthermore, various studies have shown that technology can be a source of interference in family communication, especially when the use of digital devices is excessive. "Technoferece" has become a commonly used term to describe the interference that technology use produces in social interactions (Haddon 2004). A real-life example of this phenomenon is when family members are more focused on their phone or tablet screens than on direct conversations with those around them. As a result, moments that should be opportunities to strengthen family bonds can be missed. In addition, the phenomenon of "phubbing" (phone snubbing), which is the habit of ignoring people around you because you are too busy with digital devices, is also increasingly found in family interactions. This can reduce the quality of interpersonal relationships, create emotional distance, and even cause feelings of neglect among family members. However, it is undeniable that technology also provides various benefits for family communication. For example, for families who are separated due to work, study, or geographical reasons, technology allows them to stay in touch and share important moments through video calls, instant messages, or social media. Technology can even strengthen family bonds across generations by sharing photos, videos, or other digital content.

Through this study, researchers hope to identify various forms of technology's impact on family communication, from how technology can strengthen to potentially weaken family relationships. This study will also examine how families can find a balance between technology use and quality face-to-face communication. In research on the impact of technology on family communication, there are several relevant theories that can be used as a framework to understand changes in communication dynamics influenced by technology. These theories explain how human interactions are influenced by the use of technology, both in interpersonal and family contexts. Family Communication Patterns Theory is one of the relevant theories for understanding the dynamics of communication within the family, especially in the context of how technology affects interaction patterns between family members. This theory was first proposed by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) and focuses on two main dimensions of communication within the family: orientation to conversation and orientation to conformity.

Conversation Orientation measures the extent to which family members encourage openness in communication and sharing of ideas among each other. Families with a high level of conversational orientation tend to be more open to a variety of discussion topics, allowing family members to express

their opinions without feeling judged. Communication that occurs in families with a high conversational orientation is usually two-way and involves in-depth discussions. In the context of technology use, families with a high conversation orientation may be more flexible in utilizing various communication technologies to strengthen interactions. Technologies, such as video calls, instant messaging, and social media, can be used to stay connected effectively and discuss various topics even though they are in different locations. Technology in this case becomes a tool that strengthens the openness and quality of conversations within the family. However, while technology can expand the scope of communication, there is a risk that digital communication can become shallower and less emotional than face-to-face communication. This may affect the quality of conversation and emotional engagement between family members.

The conformity dimension measures the extent to which a family emphasizes uniformity of values, beliefs, and norms in communication. Families with a high conformity orientation tend to emphasize obedience to family authority and a shared understanding among family members. Communication in families with a high conformity orientation tends to be one-way, with parents or other authority figures dominating the conversation and making major decisions. In the context of technology, families with a high conformity orientation may be more restrictive in their use of technology or more conservative in their use of digital devices to communicate. They may worry that technology can disrupt family harmony or undermine traditional values that they want to maintain. For example, excessive use of technology by family members, especially children and adolescents, may be seen as a threat to existing structures and norms. In families with a low conformity orientation, technology may be more accepted as a tool to expand discussions and strengthen relationships between family members, although this also depends on how and how often technology is used. With the advent of digital technology, traditional family communication patterns are shifting. Families with a high conversation orientation may see technology as a means to strengthen family bonds and expand opportunities for discussion, while families with a high conformity orientation may be more likely to limit the use of technology to maintain unity of views and values. One of the major challenges facing families in the technological age is the phenomenon of “technoference,” where digital devices interfere with face-to-face interactions between family members. Excessive use of technology can reduce quality time spent together, thus affecting overall communication patterns. In families with a high conformity orientation, technology that is perceived as interfering with communication can exacerbate tensions, especially when the use of technology by the younger generation is perceived as contradictory to traditional family values.

In this study, family communication theory can be used as a framework to understand how technology affects communication within families. This study will examine whether families with a high conversation orientation are more open to the use of technology in communication compared to families that are more conformity-oriented. In addition, this study will also explore how this communication orientation impacts the quality of relationships and emotional bonds within families, both through digital and face-to-face communication. By using this theory, research can explore the various dynamics of family communication in the digital age, including how technology can strengthen or strain family relationships depending on existing communication patterns. With this theory of family communication, research on the impact of technology on family communication can be analyzed more deeply by considering how technology affects different communication patterns within families.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD



This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine the impact of technology on family communication. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this study is to understand the experiences, perceptions, and dynamics of communication in families, which requires an in-depth study of the context and process of interaction between family members. Case studies are used to explore in depth the phenomena that occur in certain families in the context of technology use.

2.1. *Research Approach*

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to comprehensively describe how technology affects family communication. This approach is suitable for exploring complex and in-depth phenomena, such as communication patterns that occur in families that are influenced by the use of technology. According to Creswell, a qualitative approach is very effective in gaining a deep understanding of issues related to human experience and social interaction. In this case, the use of technology and its impact on family communication dynamics can be explained in more detail through in-depth interviews and observations of family interactions (Creswell and Creswell 2017).

2.2. *Research Design: Case Study*

The case study method was chosen because it allows researchers to study families in depth as specific units of analysis. Case studies are a very suitable method for understanding phenomena in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are unclear. In this study, each family will be studied as a case to understand how technology affects communication patterns and relationships between family members. Yin stated that case studies are very useful when researchers want to explore the questions "how" and "why" related to complex phenomena, such as the impact of technology on communication in families. This study will explore how technology is used in families, as well as why technology has a positive or negative impact on relationships between family members (Yin 2018).

2.3. *Research Participants*

The participants of this study were families selected purposively. The purposive sampling method was used to select families with certain characteristics, namely families who have access to and actively use technology in their daily lives. The families selected will consist of at least two generations (for example, parents and children), to see how generational differences affect technology use and intergenerational communication patterns. The families selected are expected to come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, so as to provide broader insights into how technology affects different types of families. Each family will be interviewed in depth to collect qualitative data about their experiences in using technology to communicate.

2.4. *Data Collection*

Primary data will be collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews will be conducted with all family members who are willing to participate, focusing on their experiences with technology use and how it affects interactions and communication within the family. Semi-structured interviews will be used to allow the researcher to explore answers in more depth and be flexible, depending on the participant's responses. Participant observation will also be conducted to see firsthand how technology is used in everyday interactions within families. For example, researchers

can observe how family members use mobile phones, tablets, or other devices when interacting, both in face-to-face and virtual contexts (Yin 2018).

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, data collection through interviews and observations. This approach is expected to provide a deep understanding of how technology affects communication in families. With this comprehensive research design, it is hoped that the results of the study can provide a clear and in-depth picture of the impact of technology on family communication in the digital era.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the research results obtained from interviews and participant observations will be analyzed using the Family Communication Patterns Theory framework. The discussion will be divided into several main themes that emerged from the data analysis, namely the use of technology in the family, the positive and negative impacts of technology on family communication, and family communication patterns based on conversation orientation and conformity. From the interview results, most families in this study indicated that technology, especially mobile devices, social media, and instant messaging applications, are an important part of daily interactions. Technology allows family members to stay in touch, especially for families who are very busy or live far apart. For example, parents use applications such as WhatsApp or Telegram to stay connected with their children, especially when they are at school or doing activities outside the home.

However, the pattern of technology use is also influenced by generational differences. Older generations, especially parents, tend to use technology for functional purposes (e.g., to organize schedules or share important information), while younger generations use technology more often for entertainment or social interaction through social media. This indicates differences in technology use preferences that can affect family communication dynamics. In some cases, technology is also used as a surveillance tool by parents. They use technology to monitor their children's whereabouts or activities through location tracking applications. While this provides a sense of security for parents, older children sometimes feel that their privacy is being invaded. Based on research findings, technology has provided various benefits in strengthening family communication, especially in the context of maintaining connectivity amidst busy lives and geographical distance. Some families reported that technology has allowed them to communicate more frequently than before. For example, families separated by work or study can stay connected through regular video calls, which helps strengthen their relationships despite the distance.

Technology also facilitates fast and efficient communication in conveying important information. In this case, messaging applications such as WhatsApp or LINE make it easy for family members to share information quickly without having to wait for an opportunity to meet in person. Technology has helped reduce the barriers of time and space, allowing family members to feel connected even though they are not always physically together. Additionally, technology also allows families to participate in virtually integrated family activities, such as watching movies together through streaming services or playing online games together. This can help strengthen relationships between family members, especially when they are unable to spend time together in person.

Although technology offers many benefits, the findings of this study also show negative impacts on family communication, especially related to the phenomenon of technofence or interference of technology in face-to-face interactions. Many families reported that excessive use of technology, especially by children and adolescents, can interfere with family interactions. For example, several participants complained that their children spent more time in front of screens (gadgets) than interacting with other family members. In families with high conformity orientation, parents feel that technology, especially social media, reduces their control over communication patterns and values held

by children. Some parents stated that they feel they have lost their authority in influencing children's values and behavior because children are more exposed to outside information through the internet. Families with high conformity orientation feel that technology can threaten the unity of values and norms in the family. Another phenomenon identified is the neglect of face-to-face communication. Some families stated that although technology allows them to communicate more frequently, the quality of that communication tends to decline. Digital communication is often considered less emotional and shallower than face-to-face conversations. This can have an impact on decreasing intimacy and emotional closeness between family members. From the results of the analysis, it can be seen that conversation orientation and conformity orientation greatly influence the way technology is used in family communication.

3.1. Families with High Conversation Orientation

Families with a high conversation orientation tend to be more open to using technology to expand the space for discussion and interaction. Parents in these families are less concerned about the impact of technology on family values, and are more likely to encourage their children to share information, opinions, and experiences through various digital platforms. Technology is seen as a means to enrich communication, rather than a threat to interpersonal relationships. In these families, technology use tends to be more balanced, with family members still communicating digitally but not neglecting face-to-face interactions. Some families reported using technology to plan family activities or share important moments, but still prioritizing time to gather in person when possible.

3.2. Families with High Conformity Orientation

In contrast, families with a high conformity orientation are more conservative in their use of technology. Parents in these families more often limit their children's use of technology, especially regarding social media and internet access. They feel that technology can damage the norms and values that are upheld in the family. Parents often provide strict rules about when and how their children can use technological devices. In some cases, these restrictions actually cause tension between parents and children, especially for teenagers who feel that technology is an important part of their social life. These different perceptions of technology often lead to small conflicts, where parents try to maintain control, while children want more freedom in using technology.

The results of the discussion show that technology has a complex impact on family communication. On the one hand, technology can strengthen communication and maintain connectedness between family members, especially in situations where face-to-face interaction is difficult. However, on the other hand, excessive or unbalanced use of technology can damage the quality of communication and cause disruption in face-to-face interaction. In addition, family communication orientation, both in terms of conversation and conformity, plays an important role in determining how technology is used and how it impacts family relationships. Families with a high conversation orientation tend to be more open to the use of technology, while families with a high conformity orientation are more cautious and limit the use of technology to maintain traditional values. This discussion underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of family communication patterns in the technological era, where a balance between digital and face-to-face communication needs to be maintained to ensure the quality of family relationships remains strong. In addition to the main themes that have been discussed, there are several other important aspects that need to be considered in understanding the impact of technology on family communication. These aspects include changing roles in the family related to technology, emotional involvement and closeness

between family members, and the role of digital media in resolving family conflicts. Each of these aspects further highlights the complexity of the relationship between technology and family communication in the digital era.

Technology has brought about significant changes in the traditional roles of family members, especially in terms of how parents and children interact and carry out family responsibilities. One interesting finding from this study is that children, especially younger ones, are often the “technologists” in the family. They are quicker to master the latest technological devices and applications, and often assist parents or grandparents in using technology. These changes sometimes create a role reversal, with children becoming more technologically savvy than parents. While on the one hand, this can strengthen relationships through collaboration (for example, when children teach parents how to use a particular app), on the other hand, it can also create parental dependence on children for technology-related matters. This dependence, in some cases, can reduce parental authority and make them feel less empowered in aspects of life that are increasingly dominated by technology. In addition, these changes can also affect the distribution of responsibilities within the family, especially when it comes to digital communication. Parents may hand over more family communication responsibilities to more tech-savvy children, such as organizing family meetings or managing family chat groups. These roles, although small, can have an impact on the balance of power within the family and reinforce generational differences in control and decision-making.

Emotional engagement between family members is often one aspect that is impacted by technology. Several participants in this study reported that technology allows them to stay emotionally connected despite being separated by physical distance. For example, the use of video calls helps families feel close to relatives who live far away, such as parents who work out of town or children who are studying abroad. However, while technology can enhance emotional connectedness, there are indications that the quality of emotional engagement in digital interactions is not always the same as in-person communication. Communication via text or social media is often more ephemeral and limited, making it less suitable for expressing feelings or building deep intimacy. For example, some family members felt that while they were communicating more frequently digitally, it tended to be functional and not truly emotionally deep. In this case, families with a high conversation orientation are more likely to use technology to stay emotionally connected, while families with a conformity orientation are more focused on using technology for more functional purposes. Technology cannot completely replace the emotional closeness that comes from face-to-face interaction, but if used wisely, technology can help maintain emotional connectedness between family members.

Technology also plays a significant role in how family conflicts are managed and resolved. Interviews revealed that some families use technology, such as messaging apps or email, to resolve conflicts or communicate during disagreements. Digital media, in some cases, is seen as an easier way to express feelings without the pressure of face-to-face interactions, which can trigger more intense emotions. Some family members said they found it easier to communicate their feelings through text or instant messaging than they did face-to-face, especially in more emotional conflicts. By writing messages, they felt they were better able to control their emotions and present their arguments in a more structured way. This is in line with previous research showing that digital communication can help people avoid over-escalating emotions in interpersonal conflicts. However, on the other hand, the use of technology in resolving conflicts can also worsen misunderstandings. Text communication often lacks emotional nuances that can be interpreted differently by recipients, which can worsen conflicts. Some participants reported that ambiguous or too brief text messages sometimes led to greater misunderstandings than when conflicts were resolved through face-to-face conversations.

In families with a high conformity orientation, the use of technology in resolving conflicts is often avoided, because parents tend to prefer direct communication and view technology as a barrier to

resolving problems in depth. In contrast, families with a high conversation orientation are more likely to use technology as a tool to temporarily relieve tension, although it is still accompanied by face-to-face discussions for more complete resolution. One positive finding in this study is how technology can be used to maintain family traditions. Several families reported that technology helped them maintain and commemorate important moments in family traditions, such as birthday celebrations, family gatherings, or national holidays. With technology, even though family members cannot be together physically, they can still connect through video calls or share photos and videos in real time. For example, families separated by geographical distance are using technology to celebrate important days together virtually. Family traditions, which are usually done face-to-face, can now be continued with the help of technology, so that family bonds are maintained even though they cannot be together physically.

However, this also raises debates in some families, especially those with a high conformity orientation, where physical face-to-face meetings are still considered more important than virtual meetings. For them, technology is only a temporary alternative, and cannot replace physical presence in maintaining family traditions. It is seen that technology plays a multifaceted role in family communication. Technology not only affects the frequency and manner in which family members communicate, but also changes traditional roles, affects emotional engagement, and even becomes a tool for resolving conflicts. In addition, technology also plays a role in maintaining family traditions amidst the challenges of physical distance. However, the impact of technology still depends on communication patterns within the family. Families with a high conversation orientation are more adaptable to technology as a tool to strengthen communication, while families with a conformity orientation are more cautious in accepting technology, because they are worried that technology can interfere with the values they uphold. Therefore, the use of technology in the family needs to be regulated wisely so as not to interfere with the quality of interpersonal relationships, and it is important for families to find a balance between digital and quality face-to-face interactions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that technology has a significant impact on family communication patterns. The Role of Technology in Strengthening Connectedness Technology, especially mobile devices and messaging apps, plays a vital role in maintaining connectivity between family members who are separated by distance or busyness. The use of technology allows for more frequent and efficient communication, so that relationships between family members can be maintained, especially in families with a high conversational orientation. Although technology can strengthen family relationships through more intense and efficient communication, there are also negative impacts that cannot be ignored, such as technoferece, where excessive use of technology disrupts face-to-face interactions within the family. Children and teenagers who use gadgets too much often reduce the time to interact directly with their families. Families with a high conversation orientation are more likely to use technology as a means to expand communication and emotional engagement. In contrast, families with a high conformity orientation are more cautious in their use of technology, fearing its impact on traditional family values and parental control.

Technology also plays a role in family conflict resolution. Some families use text messaging or messaging apps to defuse tensions, despite the risk of misunderstanding in non-verbal communication. The use of technology in conflict resolution is more widely accepted by families with a high conversational orientation. While technology cannot replace physical gatherings, it has helped families maintain traditions, especially when family members are in different locations. Family celebrations or important moments can still be held virtually, although this is often seen as a temporary alternative by families with a high conformity orientation.

Based on the conclusions above, here are some suggestions that can be put forward, namely that families need to set clear boundaries regarding the use of technology, especially for children and adolescents, to avoid technoferece. Parents should encourage a balance between the use of technology and face-to-face interactions so that the quality of family relationships is maintained. Technology should be used as a tool to strengthen family communication, especially for families separated by distance. Parents need to be actively involved in the use of technology with their children to create moments of togetherness, such as doing activities together online or using applications for family activity planning. While technology can help maintain family traditions, it is important for families to prioritize face-to-face interactions whenever possible. Physical family traditions should be maintained, and technology should only be used as a tool when necessary. Families need to be more aware of the long-term impacts of uncontrolled technology use. Parents need to continue to educate their children about healthy and responsible technology use, and monitor their digital activity to ensure that technology use does not interfere with emotional well-being and the quality of family communication.

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