

## IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY TO SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to study the relationship between use of technology and social interaction or social communication among family members. This paper discusses the impact of technology usage on communication among family members. It also highlights the advantages of technology usage to and takes place among disabled children.

**Keywords:** family communication, technology use, disabled children communication, transnational families communication, children socialization

### INTRODUCTION

The family is a sacred institution that deserves allocation of special, quality time to be spent with one another. This is to ensure that good communication takes place among the members and that there will be no boundary among them to discuss and interact on their social and academic achievements, problems or perhaps to seek for advice. The advancement of technology in the recent years has improved social interaction and communication among family members, with both positive and negative consequences.

Modern technology has, to a great extent, improved our lives in many aspects. With regards to communication, technology has also improved the way we interact and communicate with our family members in more than one ways. Latest application development has made it so easy for us to interact with others. These applications are mostly user-friendly and can be utilized almost effortlessly. The number and types of these applications are also increasing from time to time. Among the more popular medium of communication being used by people to stay connected today are WhatsApp and Skype.

### ISSUES

Technology seems to be a medium that permeates family life easily. A typical family today may consists of people from four (4) different generations, namely; (a) baby boomers generation, (b) generation X, (c) generation Y, and (d) generation Z. These generations generally know well how to use the current technologies that change one after the other.

In today's busy world, parents are usually preoccupied with work, trying to earn enough money to support their family, while the children are equally enthralled with their

academic work. With everyone engrossed in his/her own business, family members don't get to see each other often enough, much less to engage in real conversations. This is where we see the importance of technology intervention to help family members stay connected. A modern invention, such as mobile phones saves our day to help us connected with each other, even during our busiest day. In addition to that, parents may use technology to check on their children activities and safety, while the children may also use it just in case there are problems or emergencies.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The advancement of modern technology such as mobile phones, television, the Internet, video games, social media applications and other related technology have undeniably, brought major impacts on how family members communicate with each other. The research questions guiding the research are:

1. What is the relationship between technology usage and family members' social interaction?
2. What are the impacts of modern technology usage on social interaction among family members?

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research is focusing on the impact of technology on communication among family members as the authors found little is discussed on this issue in the literature. It aims to study how family members communicate with one another, as well as to find out whether there is a relationship between technology usage and social interaction among family members. Additionally, it also wants to discover the impacts brought out by new technologies on family members' communication, whether they live close by or far from one another. New technologies especially help to connect transnational families, or long-distance family members to stay connected with one another.

The objectives of this study are:

- To study the relationship between technology usage and social interaction among family members
- To explore the influence of technology on family members' communication.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK**

Modern technology has basically made changes in every aspect of our personal lives such as education, entertainment, and communication. At the same time, it also affects our social institutions such as family, school, and workplace.

## Communication between Transnational Families

Transnational families are families whom one, or some of its members live far away from the originating family. More often, these long-distance family members need to stay far away from their own family to fulfill their responsibilities towards their studies or working life. Staying away from family members means it is not possible for these people to engage in the traditional, face to face interaction with their family members. Modern technology has enabled these people to stay connected with their families through latest communicating inventions. In the last decades, there are increasing tools and gadgets that can be used for communicating such as smartphones and personal computer that are equipped with applications such as WhatsApp, Skype, WeChat, Snapchat, Facebook, and etc.. According to Francisco (2013), the lives of migrants and the families that they left behind have already changed these days due to development in computer technology which allows us to use these latest applications. Earlier on, communication was almost impossible as there were only mailing services and static or public telephones available for those who wished to connect with their family.

The importance of family members to stay connected is also highlighted by Furukawa & Driessnack (2013). They explain that when an individual chooses to study abroad or when an individual is being employed for military services or job-related responsibilities, there is a good chance that the person will be disconnected from his/her family members in transnational separations. However, due to mobile phone and computer technology development today, people who migrated to other countries should not fear of being separated from their loved ones as there are numerous applications available for communication purposes and at affordable prices. Hence, communication is not a problem anymore, even if your loved ones are half way across the world. Digital communication technologies receive huge acceptance from people all over the world and demand for it as a medium of communication increases from time to time over the past few years. This has inevitably changed the way people communicate. Face-to-face interaction seems to be no longer important to maintain social contacts as it used to be before as the developments of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has allowed more convenience, long distance communication without a physical presence (Tillema, Dijst & Schwanen, 2010). These technologies not only exist for the purposes of entertainment or leisure but also for the purposes of getting the society to get connected even if they are far apart.

Bolton et.al (2013) explains that the most frequent you engage in communication technology devices, the more likely that you will feel like you are communicating physically although, in reality, you are a distance apart (Adler, 2013; Drago, 2015). Hence, only by using those media that people can still get connected and maintain the relationship with their families. We should bear in mind that these media are adopting to achieve real-time audio and visual communications, allowing almost real physical interactions (Kang, 2012). This suggests that the technological advancement has brought so many positive impacts to transnational families, especially when it comes to communication.

## Disabled Children Communication Development

The development of computer technology covers a wide range of disciplines such as military, education, entertainment, and health. For instance, computer programmers are trying to improve the quality of life of special needs people, such as autism and visually impaired children. There are so many companies trying to develop a communication medium for this group so that they will have a chance to communicate and say what they want to. Innovation in new communication medium for special needs children will allow parents to communicate better and show their empathy towards their children. One thing to consider is that parental education is important for parents who take care of their disabled children. They need to be comfortable with the technology in order for them to be able to communicate better with their children. A study by Wong & Cohen (2011) technically divides parents into two general groups; (a) parents that do not make use of ICT and remain ignorant towards the assistive technology; and (b) parents who have a good awareness of ICT use and assistive technology. Basically, the advancement of technology has positive impacts on disabled children as it is now possible for them to communicate, where previously it wasn't.

The siblings of the disabled person are found to be the key resource in helping their parents and disabled brothers and sisters in the familiarity of ICT as they are naturally exposed to the ICT and digital things (Wong & Cohen, 2011). Children with disabilities sometimes have more things to explore as their opportunity to explore things on their own are somehow restricted. Regardless, advancement of technology has offered more opportunities for these special children to explore the world. As for the autism children, the alternatives of using advanced audio coding have taken into the attention of most parents and FindMe application actually help in their boosting social communication skills. Both strategies empirically used to upkeep knowledge and communicative communication rather than only replacing the natural speech (Beukelman and Mirenda, 2005) and thought to be useful to the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). To be clear about this, it has been recommended that a visual language in audio coding be appealed to the continued strength in the processing of visual information among individuals with ASD (Mirenda and Schuler, 1988).

Representatives of non-perishable language may support the understanding (Ganz et al., 2012) and the usage of recognizable communication symbols may help in communication in order to interpret and respond to an individual. Those alternatives of communication developed for the ASD children meet the need of those ASD children that are usually self-absorbed and appears to exist in their own private world. This has caused them to be unable to communicate and interact with others including their own families. One of the applications that were developed is FindMe. It is actually aimed to boost up real world social communication skills of ASD children by motivating, daily practices of the most basic sub-skills (Fletcher-Watson, 2015)'s communicative attempts (Loncke and Bos, 1997; Trembath et al., 2013). Most of ASD children are having difficulty in communicating and communicate nonverbally especially with their hand gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions.

## Children Socialization

Children socialization is important for their development process. It is a life-long process that will keep on coming and distracting them in many different ways. Children make use of technology and tremendously immersed into social networking sites that happened to have communication components (Fletcher & Blair, 2012). As what already stated by Fletcher & Blair (2012), children love to communicate as they have a lot of things to be said and shared. Sometimes it may be hard for them to tell their experiences of the day to their own family and they prefer to share it through their own social networking as they might be sometimes appeared as anonymous. A large body of research focuses on these technologies and their effects on youth's self-esteem and psychological well-being (Ahn, 2011; Grace, Raghavendra & Newman; Wood & Connell, 2014). Studies such as (Williams & Merten, 2011) found that use of social media among the Gen Y has some positive effects on the youth's psychology as well as their emotional well-being. For instance, use of social media is found helpful to strengthen family bond (Williams & Merten, 2011) and supportive to cultivate social connection among the Gen Y (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Bolton, 2013). It is important to note that the youngsters today also have their own technology medium to socialize and stay connected with others.

Children all around the world are growing up at the time when new communication technologies become more easily available to some families and communities (International Telecommunications Union, 2012; Kelly, 2013). Generation Y's and Z's are the generations that gain so many benefits from that advanced technology as they generally know how to navigate a particular technology automatically. Basically, they use the technology to socialize in a healthy way. Along these lines, communication norms established in the family may be able to contour the way in which young people understand reality and define it as a set of skills needed for youth socialization (Shah et al., 2009; Valenzuela, Bachmann & Aguilar, 2016). These families are usually the ones that always spend their time, thoughts, feelings, plan together and make decisions together as a family. They see that open and frequent conversation seems to be the most important thing in educating the children (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a, 2004; Rudi, Walkner & Dworkin, 2014). However, it is important to remind that families need to help their children to develop their ability to socialize in a healthy way and to warn the children of the consequences of technology misuse.

Development of computer and cell phones technologies have opened up new opportunities for children to be part of social networking users (Drussell, 2012). Children are now able to develop many skills by connecting to one another, Ljung-Dwarf et al. (2008) (Stephen, Stevenson & Adey, 2013). Other studies discuss the positive impacts of technology use for learning, such as; promote a new way of thinking and enable new pedagogical practices that support learning development (Yelland et al. 2008 & Parette et al. 2010; Saidatul, 2014; Yu, Abrizah, Abdullah Sani, 2016). Thus, new technology helps children in acquiring new skills and improving their school achievements. In all, digital technologies at home not only enhance social interactions among children but

also enable us to teach our children on how to use these technologies for learning and to succeed in their lives (Mesch, 2006; McGrath, 2012).

## ANALYSIS OF REVIEW

Reviews of the literature on the effects of technology on social interactions among family members have shown that there are more positive effects than the negative ones. In all, technology use only brings negative impacts during meal time, other uses of technology are found to affect the users in positive ways. First, use of technology improves communication between transnational families. This is possible through social networking sites that allow us to communicate almost like the traditional "face to face" communication such as through skype.

The second major impact revolves around disabled children communication development. However, the articles only discussed improved communication through technology among the autism and visually impaired children. The effect of technology use on other disabilities such as hearing loss speech and language disorder should be further explored.

The third impact is positive impacts on children's socialization process. In this new era, critical thinking kids should be developed and polished at home by their own parents. The communication technology does not only help to develop skills and self-esteem among children but also brings outrageous impacts on their academic achievement also

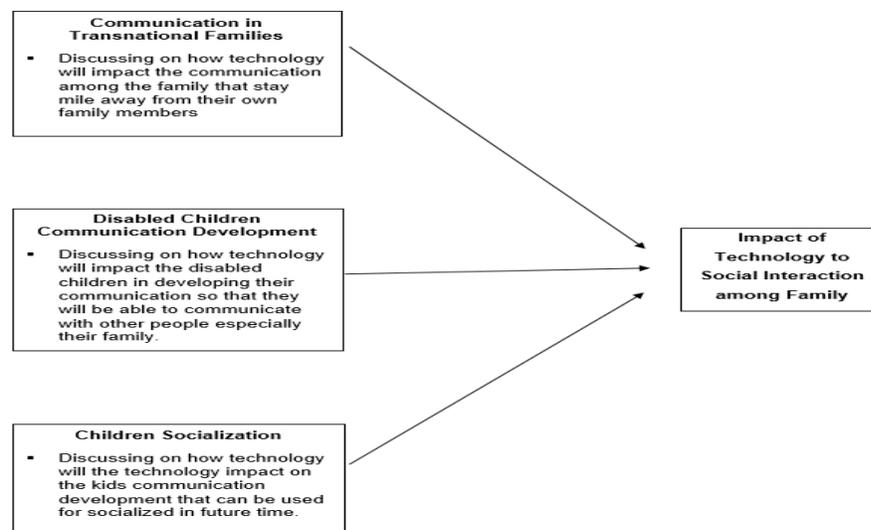


Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Framework.

Figure 1 is a proposed theoretical framework that will be used to guide this research. Based on the previous study, the proposed theoretical framework illustrates the dependent variable (impact of technology on social interaction among family members); and the independent variable (communication in transnational families, disabled children communication and development, and children socialization). The framework

will be used to answer the main research objective, that is, to explore the relationship and influence of technology on family members' communication. This research is expected to uncover more consequences of using technology among modern family members.

## CONCLUSIONS

With the advancement of technology over the years, it is crucial that we look into the effects of technology use on communication among family members. This is crucial to protect the well-being of the family institution. It is good news that studies have found that new ways of communication such as through social media and mobile phones have favorable effects on family interactions and learning achievements. Therefore, it can be said that technology has become such an important part of our lives in this new era.

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