

Understanding the Effects of Smart Phones on Marital Relations of Working Couples

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Abstract

Smartphones have changed the process of communication and interaction over decades. The new technology has changed the interpersonal relations among family members and has effects on marital life. The need to connect all the time arise issues in family life. This exploratory research aimed to know the usage patterns of mobile phones by couples and to understand whether its usage is affecting marital relations in terms of trust, friendship and tolerance. In depth interviews were conducted among working couples of Lahore. The study concluded that smartphones were excessively used during shared family time. Further, the usage of smart phones affected the marital relationships and face to face communication among partners.

Keywords: *Usage of Smartphones, Marital Relations, Working Couples.*

Introduction

The expansion in the interest of social and mass correspondence innovation helps the ground-breaking advancement of cell phone gadgets during the most recent decade. Advanced smart phones with various activity frameworks are quickly picking up fame around the world. For some individuals now, a multipurpose telephone is the basics for life (Silva, 2012). The process of this shift where almost everyone is using this gadget and having the world in his pocket is known as mediatisation (Hepp & Krotz 2014) and its impact is on our societies and common man life is very prominent. We are in a permanent mode of connectedness which has become a primary source of communication in our lives (Steinmaurer, 2014). Technology's assertion raises various issues in the family. These issues broaden far from the over the top usage of development by family (Watkins, 2009). The basic reason for the forefront phones of being at the top is they are useful and can be taken wherever with you. You essentially need a web connection and the entire world is in your hold. Smartphones are now working as a personal assistant like providing reminders, guidance on roads, helping you to find the best buffet (Ling, 2004). Smartphone usage increased worldwide in September 2019. China was at the top of the list with 851.15 (in millions) users in country wise usage. Pakistan was on 18th position with 32.5 users millions (Holst, 2019), while the estimated population of Pakistan in 2019 was 204.73 million (Plechar, 2019).

Family, the social condition for the majority of people on the planet, addresses a critical setting for entertainment (Shaw, 1997). A quality time proceeded with one's family is implied as family time or shared time. Family time is essential for the perseverance of a family unit. A sound relationship is a fundamental key for an energetic and satisfied family (Coyné et al., 2011). A sound relationship can be cultivated by progressively more correspondence and sharing of everything in family life. Joint effort

configuration between partners chooses how satisfied they are with their marriage (Shackelford, 2007). Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) recognized social correspondence as one of the critical factors in relationship satisfaction. A study revealed that the quick addition in the use of phones has comparatively influenced various pieces of open exercises of individuals from wherever all through the world. It has changed all around the sentiment of culture, society, character, and regular associations (Kamel, 2011). Turkle (2011) argued that people are disengaging from each other in perspective on media use. They are physically together in any case, not normally display for each other. Marital relationship relies upon closeness.

In Pakistani culture, family bonds are strong due to social and social characteristics. This is the explanation the example of nuclear family structure is overwhelming especially among urban masses. Family is planned to give warmth, security, preparing, beguilement, money related assistance and transmission of severe and social characteristics to their kids yet with the present commitment of smartphones family bonds are crippling (Mesch, 2016). A healthy relationship is a basic element for happy and satisfied families (Coyne et al., 2011). Interaction patterns between spouses determine how satisfied they are with their marriage (Shackelford, 2007). Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) identified interpersonal communication as one of the important factors in relationship satisfaction. Turkle (2011) argues that people are separating from each other because of media usage. They are physically together but not mentally present for each other. Marital relationship is based on intimacy.

The assessment intends to find the effects of smartphone usage and on couple's mutual relationships. The current study investigates the degree of cell phone usage in the family framework. Adaptable telephones have become a critical part of the present occasions. This assessment inquires about the effect of cell phones on couples, particularly in urban areas, beginning at now have included calendars and a very kept time for their families. This research adopted the qualitative method to inquire about the relationship between the fulfillment of family life and the usage of progression. The present study investigates the extent of smart phones usage during family hours and its effects on marital life with the Pakistani perspective where relationship and family life comes first.

Living in society, people not only interact with each other but also develop a relationship with each other. Few relationships are not our personal choice like our family but our friendships are dependent on our choices. "An interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep, close association between two or more people. This association may be based on love, solidarity, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment." With the emergence of new media technology partner relationships are now going to be blurred (Chesley, 2005; Leggett & Rossouw, 2014). It is the need for time to investigate the impact of smartphones on spouse relationships. Spouse as a unit of the family holds an important place. The need of the hour is to know whether the incorporation of cutting-edge cell phones strengthens the family bond or the condition is backward especially in Pakistan where family system and culture have its roots deep in the soil. With the extended utilization of smartphones for an amazing duration scarcely any request is raised like how families are overseeing outrageous usage, how social family structure and its components associated with each other? New trends are emerging in Pakistani society's family system where female partners also started working to support and fulfill the family need. The shared time that parents and kids spend together is already very limited now because of working parents, especially in urban families. Smart phones have become part of our family communication. This study intends to understand the effects of smart phones on couple's communication and their relationship.

Objective of the study

This exploratory research aimed to know the usage patterns of mobile phones by couples and to understand whether its usage disturbing marital relations in terms of trust, friendship and satisfaction.

Review of Literature

Previous researches suggested that excessive usage of smart phones can cause behavioral addiction or video game addiction (Choliz, 2010). Mobile phone usage during family hours can cause more stress when you are sitting with your family and responding to the emails through your smartphones (Czechowsky, 2008). Interpersonal communication is an important element in a marital relationship and it can play a major role in marital satisfaction (Ahlstrom et al, 2012). A group of scholars have focused on the interrelation between family working and development usage (Aponte, 2009) and on the assessment between very close correspondence and the collaboration through imaginative specific contraptions (Blinn-Pike, 2009). The usage of the internet can be a sound activity for the whole family as it tends to impact the family life quite by supporting in different eras of family improvement (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Mesch, 2006a).

The Marital relationship requires the presence of both for each other for a healthy mutual relationship (Siegel, 2010). It is not the matter of presence only, there must be strong affection between both of them and they can be focused only when there is no outer distraction (Leggett & Rossouw, 2014). It is now generally said that mobile technology has become part of every society worldwide and the number of users is on the increase day-to-day Hakoama and Hakoyama, (2011). With the increasing penetration of mobile phones, the problematic use of mobile phone deserves attention (Kim, 2015), however, the role of smart phone were found significant in women's lives as well.

The working women's independence has increased now and it also influenced women's attitude and their responsibilities that affected marital relationships (Meltzer and McNulty, 2010). So, the families where both husband and wife are working need more attention to deal with marital issues and to identify the distracting elements when they are together at home. The *Socio-Technological Model* helps to describe the relationship between technology and family. This model of family interaction works at a different level. It explains technology characteristics, family factors, individual traits, and influences. Information Communication Technology is comprehensively chosen for equipment i.e. PCs, brilliant telephones, and the webcams. The fast development of ICT's has significantly affected the contemporary way of life and we have gotten reliant on it. The foundation of the family has been chosen to think about the effect of advanced smart phones since the family has significant role in individual development.

Lahore is a generally created city of Pakistan; an immense populace utilizes advanced cell here when contrasted with different urban areas of Pakistan. Groups of Lahore will be the populace of Research since Lahore is the second most populated nearly having 11,126,285 populace size. Pakistan comprises 32.21 million families wherein the normal family comprises of 6.45 people. This family unit size is bit by bit diminishing in Pakistan due to the diminishing fruitfulness rate and the tendency among individuals to live autonomously.

Research Method

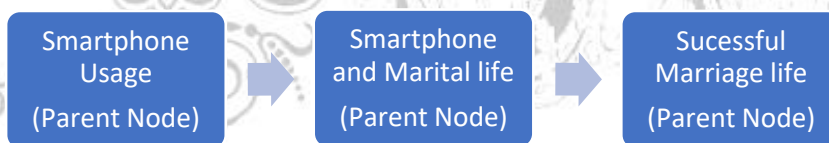
Qualitative methodology was opted and *in-depth interviews* were conducted to collect data. The *target population* was families Lahore, Pakistan considering the second highest populated city and convenience to approach the subjects. Sample of fifty couples were chosen through *purposive sampling method* according to the requirements to meet the aim of research study. The working married couples were chosen purposively where both husband and wife were professionals. It is crucially important to know and understand the effects of smart phones on working couples considering when wife and husband both are working and belong to a profession then they have very limited family time to spend together at home. So the study intended to understand the effects of smart phones on the marital relations of working couples. The age group of the participants was ranged from 30 to 45, considering this age group as in early married life.

Data Collection and Analytical Techniques

Interviews were organized to understand the extent of usage during family hours and its effects on marital relationships. The duration of each interview varied from 30-50 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the researchers and were recorded (Audio/ Video) by the permission of the participants. “NVivo 12” software was used for qualitative data analysis in the present study because of its uniqueness to organized folders according to their types and it helps to arrange it in different folders. NVivo has the strength of applying queries and extracting from audio-video interviews (Ishak & Bakar, 2012). Study themes were identified; nodes and sub-nodes were developed based on recorded audio-video interviews. “*The Word Frequency Query*” helped to find the frequency of words used in recorded data. “Word Tag Clouds” identified a complete view of the words in different sizes. The repeated words are shown in bigger sizes; however, a word with minimum regularity appears in small size. It helps to identify the relationship between strong and weak bonds of factors between each other. “*The Coding Query*” conducted to show thematic analysis by text coding method. Specific “nodes” were developed to display textual data. Nodes were developed to identify different factors affecting the relationship between spouses. Every single factor of textual data was focused to identify the related evidence. Following three categories were classified into the nodes and parent nodes:

1. Smartphone Usage (Parent Node)
2. Smartphone and Marital life (Parent Node)
3. Successful Marriage Life (Parent Node)

Sources (S) is the frequency of the participants (sources) whose discussions were coded in that particular theme while References (R) is the total numbers of coding of a theme. References (R) can be equal to or more than the number of sources (S) because if one participant discusses the particular theme twice in his interview then we code the theme twice which means two times coding (R=2) from a single source (single participant) (S=1). Parent nodes were developed to show each category of the factors affecting marital relationships through mobile phones. After that, all related nodes/themes were placed under each related parent node.



Analysis and Discussion

Word cloud query showed specific stress on few words like mobile cause improper damage relationships. It becomes a reason for conflict between couples. Less communication is another factor that affects married couple relationship. Smartphone usage during family hours causes irritation and loneliness.



The Coding Query

Based on empirical evidence, the following section provides a detailed discussion of different themes identified in this study. This discussion focuses on three main categories.

1. The extent of smartphone Usage during family hours.
2. The key factors which are required for a happy married life.
3. How smartphones are affecting the life of married couples.

According to data participant showed smartphone usage during family hour is 50% (S=20, R=60), 60% (S=30, R=50), 80% (S=50, R=140). That shows that smartphones are penetrated in family life more than anything. Obsession with our cell phones appears to endure from the moment we wake to the minute we nod off. Most of the participants were using mobile phones because of extra office work and few of them were just using it to get entertained. One of the participants responded when asked about usage extent.

"I cannot leave my mobile phone unattended, not even for a second. It's my job in nature. I also cannot put it on silent when I am sleeping and I cannot help the situation. Sometime I just receive mail late night and I have to respond to them instantly. I don't have any specific working hours. I have sold out myself for twenty-four hours."

Another participant responded;

"When I am at home, I also want to spend time the way I love to. So I just my time with my mobile. I feel relaxed while playing games and listening to my favorite music. I feel so much attachment to my mobile that I open up my eyes and look for my mobile and during sleeping, I also woke up so many times at night and check my phone."

Smartphones affect marital life in causing conflict (S=90, R=180). Smartphones become part of conflict especially when a couple is spending time together. One of the participants responded having tears in her eyes.

"That hurts me a lot when I am talking to him and he is looking at his phone with more concentration then looking into my eyes. Sometimes I feel he doesn't need me. He hardly listens to my words, his more focus is on his cell phone all the time."

Smartphone usage during family hours causes irritation (S=100, R=100). Causing irritation was a major point that was found out as all participants were agreed on this point that smartphones source of irritation in their life that later becomes the reason for conflict. Many participants were agreed on the point that smartphones are the reason for their damaged relationship. When they are sitting together they are not mentally present for each other. Their communication through smartphones is much stronger than face to face communication. Similarly, Brown et al. (2016) investigated the impacts of cell phone use on communication quality on couple relations by watching and estimating cell phone use while they were under the feeling that they were holding back to start scrutiny. On the side of their speculation, the analysts found that expanded cell phone utilization was essentially adversely connected with cooperation quality. It gives the feeling of unimportance between couples. While other participant responded in a way that,

"I had broken his cell phone twice just because he is sitting with me and playing games on mobile. It has become a major reason for our arguments with each other."

It creates distance (S=87, R=160) between the couple and also becomes the reason for the damaged Relationship (S=70, R=190). Most of the couples give married life a second priority and their priority is their personal life. Specifically, this trait was observed in males and women in revenge and sometimes in frustration start doing the same.

“When I got married I was not habitual of watching series, but here I saw all my in-laws are busy using cell phones and watching series on it. I had nothing to do because they were no one available to sit and talk to me so I started following the same routine.”

Many of the couples reported improper response (S=50, R=140) while using smartphones in the family. They hardly can identify what to say to whom and mostly they respond in head-nodding no matter what the question was asked.

“Mostly when I am using my smartphone, my kids and husband asks questions and mostly I say yes because I don't want any sort of further communication on that topic and keep disturbing me anymore. Mostly this trick is used by my kids, when they see I am using a phone they will ask for such things to do that they know in the normal condition I will not respond with yes”.

Another participant responded that,

“No matter what I am asking from him, his response will be nodding his head, eyes on the phone. It's frustrating sometimes. I don't know how to behave in response.”

An overview controlled to 1,000 members over the United States by Braun Research Center (2015) uncovered that 35% of respondents announced going after their cell phones before anything else, even before going after their better half. So also, 23% detailed having nodded off with their cell phones in their grasp, and 36% of respondents (and 54% of millennial respondents) revealed that they always check and use their cell phones. People appear to be pulled towards these gadgets for the day, over a wide exhibit of settings. Research undoubtedly recommends that individuals experience difficulty controlling their cell phone use; members revealed utilizing their telephones at awkward occasions, for example, before bed, while examining, in class, (Li et al., 2015) and in other open spaces. When participants were asked about how much they discuss things with each other they responded in less discussion (S=80, R=90). Couples hardly find time to discuss things with each other because of their busy routine and spending more time on their smartphone during family hours. Most of the time spending with your smartphone device causes loneliness (S=90, R=110). It affects couples in different ways. It doesn't mean that the spouse who is using a smartphone will not feel loneliness or it will affect only the opposite spouse but it affects both of them at different times. One participant responded to show the tiredness of using a smartphone.

“Sometimes I also feel tired of using smartphones, liking the pictures of unknown people on Facebook. It seems fake to me, but I can't help it.”

It isn't a matter of quality just, there must be love between them two and they can be centered just when there is no external interruption (Leggett and Rossouw, 2014). Participants shared that the use of smartphones is the reason for less discussion between them that later becomes the reason for loneliness. Previous analyzes recommend smartphones over the top use can cause lead reliance (Choliz, 2010). Participants when asked about physical and mental presence and the responses were almost no mental presence when sitting with family especially when using a smartphone (S=79, R=120). Respondents were asked to select the basic thing for successful marriage life is tolerance (S=80, R=90). Most of them give it top position to successful married life.

“I believe marriage is strongest as well as weakest relationship on earth, where two people of different mindsets live together. I think that this relationship cannot persist without having tolerance for each other. Tolerance is needed to bear with each other choice. It should not be one-sided but personal space should be given to each person equally.”

The next factor that was given the second priority of satisfaction in married life was recommended by most of the respondents was friendship (S=98, R=110).

“I do believe if you are a good friend of your wife and she also treats you as her best friend then you don’t need to watch your favorite things separately. You can together watch your favorite shows can play games, listen to favorite music together. It is all about common interests that make the relationship strong.”

Even a few participants shared they feel closer to the person to whom they are talking through smartphones rather than sitting in front of them. Participants shared that because both of them are always stressed so that is why their kids also suffer and they ignore their kids also for some time just because they are busy on smartphones. A conjugal relationship requires the proximity of both for one another for a mollified relationship (Siegel, 2010).

The third element of successful life identified was loyalty (S=30, R=50) and the fourth one was trust (S=40, R=40).

“Having trust and being loyal to your partner is important. I can’t be with him all the time, but how much he is loyal to me does matter when I am not around. I trust him fully but his distraction because of the phone during family hours effects over a relationship a lot.”

The absurd utilization of mobiles during family hours can cause more weight when you are sitting with your family and responding to the messages through your mobiles (Czechowsky, 2008). Social correspondence is a critical part of the matrimonial relationship and it can expect huge employment to marital satisfaction (Ahlstrom et al. 2012).

Conclusion

The study intended to understand the effects of smart phones on the marital relations and concluded that it has been penetrated in family life that is being heavily used during shared family time. Couples hardly find time to discuss with each other because of their busy routines and spending more time on their smartphone during family hours. The interpersonal communication is also being affected due to the use of smartphones as many couples reported to be distracted with phones while talking to family members. It is concluded that the advancement of technology has changed communication patterns and more people are dependent on such devices that have a negative impact on interpersonal communication and family relationships. The excessive use of smart phones during the family time is creating conflicts and issues among couples. The trust level and friendship, that are essential for a successful married life, are also affected due to smart phones. The use of smart phones is creating lack of trust, friendship and satisfaction in relationship between married couples. Marital relationships are becoming complex and need to understand further.

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