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The Impact of Gadget Use Habits When Gathering on Family Social Interactions

Bella Febriani¹

¹Department of Communication Science, UIN Alauddin Makassar

*Corresponding Author: Bella Febriani

E-mail: bellafebriani01@gmail.com

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Abstract

Mobile phone usage has become an integral part of daily life, influencing various aspects of human interaction, including family relationships. This study examines the impact of mobile phone usage during family gatherings on social interaction quality, emotional bonding, and relationship satisfaction. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating descriptive and inferential statistical analyses from a sample of 200 respondents. The findings reveal a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between mobile phone usage and family interaction quality, indicating that higher mobile engagement significantly reduces meaningful communication. Additionally, regression analysis ($\beta = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that excessive device use predicts lower family connection. The study also highlights the emotional consequences of mobile distractions, with 42.5% of respondents reporting feelings of annoyance when ignored in favor of a mobile device. A significant difference in relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.001$) was found between high and low phone users, reinforcing the argument that excessive mobile use disrupts family harmony. This study fills an important gap in existing literature by focusing on family interactions rather than romantic or workplace relationships, offering practical implications for fostering mindful technology use within households. Future research should explore long-term consequences and intervention strategies to mitigate the negative effects of mobile phone distractions on family dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Even in the modern digital environment, the eating of devices in daily activities is becoming a necessity that even melts into the unit of family communication. Despite the fact that such technologies do present certain significant benefits as the greatest one is the ability to remain in contact with the related persons regardless of the geographic barrier and the ability to obtain access to a significant amount of information, extended exposure to the use of such devices can undermine the operations by which relationships in the familial setting are strongest normally. This process has been known as phubbing which refers to the preference to focus on a digital screen rather than on interpersonal communication (Zai et al., 2022).

In the empirical studies, it was found out that the use of gadgets at common family events reduces the number and the quality of the conversation. In cases when players are positioning themselves in front of the computer in mobile devices rather than toward each other, the engagement and exchange on the emotional level are also reduced. Furthermore, the continuous focus on gadgets may create the emotional distance and destroy the sense of intimacy between family members (Oduor et al., 2016; Rauch et al., 2018).

According to Clark (2012), about 72 percent of parents are concerned with their children spending too much time on gadgets, and 51 percent of all the teenagers say that they feel ignored by the caregivers who are busy playing with the electronic devices. These analyses reinforce the idea that gadget usage bears not only on the children, but also on the adults added to the fact that the understanding of parental attentiveness is affected by the parental obsession with devices applicable to children. Finally, these tendencies can threaten the unification of families (Clark, 2009).

Other researchers show study that the use of social-media in the interactions also additionally reduces focus on the direct presentations. Observing how gadgets cause distraction among users, Przybylski & Weinstein (2013) cite frequent notifications or conversations online over dinner or at the dinner table as some of the constant triggers that provoke the distraction effect on gadget users. Therefore, excessive use of gadgets in family events may destroy the social ritual that would otherwise generate emotional and relationship intimacy. In line with that, Misra (2016) found that even the presence of a cellphone on the table can reduce the quality of social interactions, because individuals tend to be encouraged to check their devices even though there are no notifications coming in.

Not only in the relationship between parents and children, the use of gadgets also has an impact on the relationship between couples. According to research conducted by Bruun (2020), excessive use of mobile phones can trigger conflict in the household. They call the term "technoference," which is a disruption in social interaction due to technology. When couples spend more time with gadgets, their communication decreases and relationship satisfaction also tends to decrease.

On the other hand, several studies have also found that not all gadget use in families has a negative impact. If used wisely, technology can be a tool to strengthen family relationships. For example, playing games together or watching educational videos can be a bonding activity that increases interaction between family members. This is supported by research showing that families who implement healthy technology usage rules tend to have more positive interactions than families who have no rules at all (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

However, in reality, many families do not have strict rules regarding the use of gadgets when gathering. A study by Ferdous (2016) showed that most parents did not limit the use of gadgets during mealtimes, even though they were aware of its impact on communication within the family. This shows that awareness alone is not enough without regulation and commitment from each family member to build healthier interaction habits.

With the increasing use of technology in everyday life, there needs to be awareness of the long-term impacts of gadget use on family social interactions (Sari et al., 2024). It is important for families to set clear boundaries and build healthier communication habits. Therefore, this study aims to explore more deeply how the habit of using gadgets when gathering affects social interactions within the family and provide insight into strategies to maintain the quality of family relationships in the digital era.

The Problem of Study

The increasing prevalence of mobile device usage in daily life has significantly altered the nature of interpersonal relationships, particularly within family settings. While technology has enhanced communication in many ways, its excessive use during family gatherings may negatively affect face-to-face interactions. The phenomenon of “phubbing” ignoring those physically present while engaging with a mobile device has become common in social settings, including family interactions. This raises concerns about whether the habitual use of gadgets during family time contributes to weakened emotional bonds, reduced conversation quality, and lower family satisfaction.

Several studies suggest that the presence of mobile phones at the dining table, family meetings, or shared activities can lead to distractions that diminish the quality of conversations. Parents who are frequently engaged with their devices may unintentionally neglect their children’s emotional needs, leading to feelings of disconnection. Similarly, children who constantly use mobile phones during family time may develop a lower sense of belonging within their household (Buchanan et al., 2023).

Literature Review

The other role that has been played by the growing use of mobile devices is that family interaction has also witnessed a huge change as traveling in most occasions makes it more difficult to communicate face-to-face and efficiently. Although smartphones make remote connection useful, they become a source of interruption in the social environment due to the concept of technoference, created by digital distractions during meaningful sessions. Researchers have concluded that the mere presence of a mobile phone in the course of communication reduces the perceived empathy and emotional appeals among persons in an encounter, especially those in the family.

Phubbing, or ignoring someone to use a phone, is one of the most important when speaking of mobile phone distraction. This is associated with poorer emotional attachments, poorer relationship satisfaction and heightened social isolation. At the familial level, children who have their parents using the phone often during the discussions show more behavioral issues and the sense of being ignored. Also, children studying in front of the screen too much may lose their willingness to belong and decrease the unity of a family.

The negative consequences of excess use of mobile phones on the psyche go beyond the interaction in the family (Lee et al., 2014). Research has identified that the odds of being stressed, anxious, and depressed are high with the constant engagement in digitalization. Besides, it has been revealed that excessive consumption of smartphones decreases the joys of communal activities and decreases the overall relationship satisfaction. According to these findings, though it is true that digital technology is very beneficial, excessive use of this technology in family time may undermine individual interpersonal relations, as well as emotional health (Vandeleur et al., 2009).

In order to overcome them, scientists stress on the necessity to establish the boundaries in using technology among families. Some of the strategies which have been found to enhance communication and build up emotional bonding include development of technology free zones, restricted screen time and setting activities offline and family-oriented. Parents can model the positive use of digital technology and their attempts to limit the technology use can strongly improve the family life (Terras & Ramsay, 2016).

To conclude, current literature notes the harmful consequences of excessive use of mobile phones on relationships within the family and on the necessity to be responsible in using technology. Although digital devices come with conveniently and ways of connecting, there is a need to balance the use of the devices with face-to-face socialization; it is the only way of having a healthy family relationship and good health. Future research should focus on more viable ways to adopt the use of technology into everyday living without interfering with relationships between individuals (Ertmer et al., 2012).

METHODS

Research Design

The research design to be used in this study is mixed-methods where quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews or observations will be used to provide an in-depth account of the effect of mobile phone use on family interactions. The quantitative component will help to give a measurable data as to the summary of the phone usage patterns and their influence on the process of socialization, whereas the qualitative part will supply more emotional and relation-related implications of the digital distractions on the family gatherings. This combination of methods guarantees a five-dimensional picture of the phenomenon because a statistical trend in addition to individual experience is observed.

Participants

The sample that will be used in this research paper involves those families with at least one parent and a child (age 10 and above) because these are the groups that are highly impacted by the use of the mobile phone in the social environment. Participants that often use mobile devices in their family interactions will be estimated through a purposive sampling technique. The research will focus on surveying at least 150 to 300 respondents in order to meet the requirements of the statistics. There would also be 10-15 families, which will take part in intensive interviews or exercise personal observations to contribute some qualitative views. This sample is chosen in such a way as to allow a balance between generalizability and deep contextual information.

Data Collection

To collect quantitative data, a structured questionnaire will be administered to assess key factors such as the frequency of mobile phone usage during family gatherings, perceived effects on communication and emotional bonding, and overall satisfaction with family interactions. The questionnaire will use a Likert scale format (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure participants' perceptions systematically. The survey will also include demographic questions and items related to technology use habits, parental regulations on screen time, and self-reported social and emotional effects of digital distractions. This structured format ensures consistency in data collection and allows for meaningful statistical analysis.

For the qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected family members to explore their personal experiences with mobile phone use during gatherings. Interview questions will focus on how mobile device usage affects face-to-face conversations, emotional connections, and overall family dynamics. Additionally, direct observations will be conducted in natural settings, such as family meals or social gatherings, to document real-time behaviors and interactions. These observations will provide insights into non-verbal cues, engagement levels, and instances where mobile phone distractions influence the quality of interactions. The combination of interviews and observations ensures a deeper understanding of how digital habits shape family relationships.

Data Analysis

The collected quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviation, and frequency distributions to summarize mobile phone usage patterns. Inferential statistical tests, such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis, will be employed to examine relationships between mobile phone use and family interaction quality. The statistical software SPSS or R will be used to process and analyze the survey data, ensuring accuracy and reliability in findings. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses will be coded into recurring themes, such as emotional disconnection, communication barriers, and behavioral changes. A software tool like NVivo or manual coding techniques will be used to organize and interpret the data.

This dual analysis approach enables the study to validate its findings through statistical evidence while also capturing the human experiences underlying these trends. Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of this study. Before participation, informed consent will be obtained from all respondents, ensuring that they fully understand the study's purpose and their rights. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be strictly maintained, with personal data being protected throughout the research process. Furthermore, the study will seek ethical approval from an institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee to ensure that all research procedures align with ethical guidelines. Given the involvement of minors, parental consent will be required for any participants under the age of 18.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, data were collected using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how mobile phone usage during family gatherings affects the quality of family social interactions. The quantitative data were obtained from 200 respondents selected purposively from families who regularly engage in mobile phone use during social activities at home. The respondents completed structured questionnaires measuring the frequency of mobile phone usage, perceived impacts on communication, emotional bonding, and relationship satisfaction within family settings.

In addition to the survey, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and observations involving selected families. These interviews explored respondents' personal experiences and emotional reactions when ignored for the sake of mobile device usage (a behavior commonly referred to as "phubbing"). Thematic analysis of interview data helped identify recurring patterns related to emotional impacts, communication barriers, and behavioral changes within families.

The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and t-tests, while the qualitative data were analyzed thematically to enrich the interpretation of the findings. The results are presented in the following tables, which summarize the frequency of mobile phone usage during gatherings, its impact on family communication, parent-child relationship satisfaction, and the emotional reactions experienced by family members. These findings provide a detailed picture of how digital distractions, particularly mobile phones, influence the quality of interpersonal interactions within families.

Frequency of Mobile Phone Usage During Family Gatherings

Table 1. Frequency of Mobile Phone Usage During Family Gatherings

Frequency of Use	Number of Respondents (n=200)	Percentage (%)
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Always	50	25.0%
Often	70	35.0%
Sometimes	40	20.0%
Rarely	30	15.0%
Never	10	5.0%

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of respondents based on their frequency of mobile phone usage during family gatherings. The results show that mobile device usage is highly prevalent, with 60% of respondents reporting that they use their phones either *often* or *always* when spending time with their families. This substantial proportion indicates a major shift in behavioral norms within households, presenting technology use as an integral part of social activities even in contexts traditionally designed for interpersonal bonding.

Such findings align with prior observations by Oduor et al. (2016), who reported that mobile device use often interrupts co-present interactions and diminishes engagement. The current data reinforce these concerns by demonstrating that only 5% of participants refrain entirely from using their phones during family gatherings. This rarity of device abstinence suggests that mobile presence has become normalized and illustrates the pervasive nature of digital integration in everyday life, as also highlighted by Clark (2012). The high frequency of use indicates that families are increasingly functioning within an environment filled with competing digital stimuli, which may limit the capacity for sustained attention and emotional presence. The predominance of *always* and *often* responses suggests that mobile phones have become a habitual extension of interpersonal routines, reflecting the growing difficulty individuals face in disengaging from digital environments.

Impacts on Family Communication

Table 2. Perceived Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Family Communication

Impact on Communication	Mean Score (1-5 Scale)	Standard Deviation
Reduces meaningful conversations	4.2	0.78
Causes family members to feel ignored	4.0	0.85
Increases misunderstandings	3.8	0.91
Makes interactions less enjoyable	4.1	0.82
Strengthens family bonds	2.3	1.02

The results of this study reveal that the majority of respondents strongly agree that the use of mobile phones during family gatherings has a negative impact on the quality of interpersonal communication. Specifically, participants indicated that mobile phone usage tends to reduce the depth and quality of conversations, as reflected in the high mean score of 4.2. This suggests that when family members engage with their phones during gatherings, it disrupts opportunities for meaningful, face-to-face dialogue.

Furthermore, respondents reported that mobile phone use diminishes the enjoyment of family interactions, with a mean score of 4.1. This indicates that the presence of mobile devices during social moments can detract from the overall atmosphere, making interactions feel less engaging and less satisfying. In addition, many participants agreed that phone usage leads to feelings of being ignored by other family members ($M = 4.0$) and contributes to misunderstandings ($M = 3.8$), highlighting the disruptive influence of digital distractions on communication clarity and emotional connection within families.

Interestingly, the lowest-rated item in this study, "strengthens family bonds," received a mean score of 2.3. This finding clearly reflects a general perception among respondents that mobile phone use during family gatherings does not contribute positively to strengthening familial relationships. Instead, it reinforces the view that mobile devices may serve as a barrier to deeper social engagement, rather than enhancing it. These results collectively underscore the perception that mobile phone usage, particularly in social or familial settings, tends to weaken rather than strengthen interpersonal bonds.

Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction Based on Mobile Phone Usage

Table 3. Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction Based on Mobile Phone Usage

Parent Mobile Usage	Mean Satisfaction Score (1-5 Scale)	Standard Deviation
High (Always/Often)	2.7	1.12
Moderate (Sometimes)	3.5	0.95
Low (Rarely/Never)	4.1	0.85

The findings of this study indicate that the frequency of parents' mobile phone use during family interactions is associated with variations in relationship satisfaction with their children. Specifically, parents who frequently engage with their mobile phones during family time report lower levels of satisfaction in their relationships with their children ($M = 2.7$). In contrast, parents who rarely or never use their phones during these interactions report significantly higher levels of relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.1$).

These results suggest that frequent parental mobile phone usage may disrupt the quality of family interactions and diminish the emotional connection between parents and children. When parents are preoccupied with their devices, children may perceive them as less attentive or emotionally available, which can weaken the parent-child bond over time. This finding aligns with existing research emphasizing that parental distractions from technology, often referred to as "technoference," can interfere with the quality of communication and relational satisfaction within families. Therefore, minimizing mobile phone use during family interactions appears to be an important factor in maintaining healthy and satisfying parent-child relationships.

Emotional Reactions to Phubbing

Table 4. Self-Reported Emotional Reactions to Phubbing (Being Ignored for a Phone)

Emotional Reaction	Number of Respondents (n=200)	Percentage (%)
Annoyed	85	42.5%
Sad	50	25.0%
Indifferent	40	20.0%
Angry	25	12.5%

The findings show that the most frequent emotional response to being ignored in favor of mobile phone use, a behavior commonly referred to as phubbing, is annoyance, reported by 42.5% of respondents. This is followed by feelings of sadness at 25%, indicating that being overlooked during social interactions for the sake of mobile phone use evokes strong negative emotions. In contrast, only 20% of respondents reported feeling indifferent, suggesting that most individuals are emotionally affected when others prioritize phone use over direct interaction. These results highlight that mobile phone distractions within family settings do not merely disrupt communication but also have emotional consequences, often leading to frustration and hurt feelings. This emotional impact underscores the potential for

phubbing behavior to strain interpersonal relationships and reduce the quality of family interactions.

The Role of Psychological Factors in Adolescent Social Media Dependency

The study results can be considered an important pain expanding the current scientific literature on psychological well-being and technology occupation among adolescents since it provides a more complex view of how loneliness may affect social media addiction. In addition to proving this correlation, the research also gives a further understanding of the psychological mechanisms at work through determining self-esteem as the mediator and resilience as the moderator. These findings imply that loneliness is not directly linked with increased social media dependency but the route is more complex and involves how their adolescents perceive their self-worth and how they are able to cope with adversities. It is in line with the current psychological theories, which emphasize the importance of self-esteem as the determinant of behavioral response to loneliness with low self-esteem individuals as the most likely to seek the validation through over-engaging online (Keles et al., 2020; Dembińska et al., 2022; Baumeister & Robson, 2021).

In addition, resilience plays one more important moderating role in discussion. The result, which has shown that loneliness influences the determination of social media dependency, demonstrates the protective role of the psychological resource known as resilience (Bilgin & Tas, 2018). This corroborates past research that defines resilience as a prophylaxis against angst and ill behaviors (Troy & Mauss, 2011; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Showing better adaptation to loneliness without engaging in excessive use of social media, adolescents who are more resilient seem to be better able to cope with the problems of loneliness without plunging into the excessive use of social media, which makes pursuing resilience-building interventions as a possible method of alleviating the impact of technology on adolescent behavior.

The identified differences in demographics, which include females and older adolescents being more dependent on social media, are also in line with evidence provided by the literature (Pfeil et al., 2009; Tsitsika et al., 2014). Girls tend to use social media more to find emotional connection and social approval, which also makes them more susceptible to the dependence in the conditions of loneliness (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Boursier et al., 2020; Child & Lawton, 2019). Similarly, adolescents in their late teens experience more pressure at school and in social life and this can lead to even more use of digital platforms as a source of social support. These results validate the relevance of taking into account demographic aspects of the design of specific interventions.

Lastly, this research can provide its readers with practice-oriented implication beyond scholarly contribution. The insights of the roles of self-esteem and resilience given by the research provide the possibility that interventions seeking to lessen the dependency on social media should not just address the reduction of screen usage but take preference in building up the inner coping capabilities of the adolescents. Self-worth and resiliency programs may be more effective in solving the underlying cause of excessive social media use. In addition, the research will address literature shortcomings by conducting an in-depth study through the use of a mediation and moderation frameworks to understand the mechanisms between loneliness and technology use behaviors to a greater degree.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study highly point out that the use of mobile phones in a family setting disrupts the socializing activity, diminishes the emotional attachment, and reduces the overall satisfaction in the relationship. Research findings

supplement the body of existing literature since their result gives sets of empirical data on a family dimensional basis, an oversight gap that has remained unaddressed. The longitudinal effects are also relevant to be found in the future research and to identify whether the permanently alterable changes in family dynamics can be provoked by long-term habits of mobile phone usage or they are just limited to the short-term consequences. Also, the research conducted on an intervention basis may discuss whether the bans on screens during family hours may result in the possibility to measure the positive changes in communication and emotional attachment. By addressing these previously unexplored aspects, this study contributes to the growing conversation on digital distractions and their broader societal implications. It reinforces the need for mindful technology use to protect the quality of in-person relationships, especially within families.

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