Smartphone Usage and Family Communication among Residents in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined how use of smartphone affects family communication among residence in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State. Four research objective and four corresponding research questions were posed to guide the study. The study anchored on technological determinism theory, uncertainty reduction theory and social cognitive theory. The study adopted survey design. The population of the study comprises 947,625 residents of Obio/Akpo. A sample of 384 was drawn from the population using Krejcie and Morgan formula. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were adopted for the study. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was validated using face and content validity method while the test re-test was adopted to determine the reliability of the instrument and a reliability index of 0.81 was realized. Analysis was done using the mean statistics and standard deviation. The findings revealed that use of smartphone does not exact negative effect on verbal and nonverbal communication among family members; however, it negatively affects listening ability of family members, hence negatively affect family

communication. it was also discovered that use of smartphones exact both positive and negative effects on interpersonal relationships among family members, thus have the same effects on family communication. Based on the findings, the study concluded that smartphone usage has both positive and negative effects on family communication. Thus, family members should be mindful of how they use the various platforms available to them via the smartphones to enable them harness the positive opportunities the platforms offer especially as it concerns the importance of communication amongst people and also ensure that the use of these phones does not negatively influence their interpersonal relationships not just with their family members but among other people in the society. It recommended amongst others that family members should continue to engage more on face-to-face communication, this will not only strengthen their bonds but also enhance their ability to communicate freely and possibly reduce the dangers use of smartphones may have on their verbal communications.

Keywords: smartphone, family, family communication, verbal, nonverbal communication

Introduction

Effective communication is critical in every aspect of a person's life. Communication skills influence relationships in families, children, friends and at work. Good communication helps build relationships in good times, and mend relationships in difficult times. These skills include speaking as well as listening and nonverbal communication.

Family communication therefore is all the verbal and nonverbal behavior that takes place both inside the family and between the family and its social surroundings. It is an important factor in family functioning because good family communication can balance a lot of problems in the family and help families adapt to new challenges (Merkaš, 2012).

Families are defined by their communication styles, which also teach members how to form meaning and how to communicate (Schrodt, et al, 2009). Research has shown that the quality of family communication is associated with adolescents' social competence, including their communication skills (Merkaš, 2012) which are related to the psychological well-being of adolescents (Hanson, 2007).

Communication skills are socially learned behaviors that, when used in appropriate social contexts, encourage positive interactions while concurrently discouraging negative ones. Communication skills are the ability to verbally and nonverbally convey or share ideas and feelings effectively and efficiently.

A smartphone is a cellular telephone with an integrated computer and other features not originally associated with telephones e.g. web browsing, and the ability to run software applications (Provazza, 2019). Adeyi (2023) averred that smartphone usage is growing exponentially, with 6.5 billion active users worldwide. In Nigeria, there has been a tremendous increase in mobile phone usage and purchase in recent years. The citizens of Nigeria, like people in other countries, are also consumed in this technological revolution. According to Nigerian Communications Commission **(NCC)** the country had around 222.5 million telephone customers at the end of 2022, with over 215 million active mobile phone subscriptions.

Some key features of smartphones area camera, multimedia player, internet browser, navigation system, and e-mail service, social networking, and game-playing(Provazza, 2019). It distracts people from the present moment and disrupts relationships, which lead to couples break-up, destabilizing the parent-child bond, and widening the generation gap, leading to utter deterioration of social values (Sumati, 2016).

Nowadays, it's uncommon to find someone who doesn't occasionally sneak a peek at their phone especially smartphones. Although they come in handy during these worldwide lockdowns, smartphone usage might hinder relationships and effective communication. Some people still find it difficult to put their phone aside, despite the problems it brings. Regarding how often or how long they use their phone, they might notice a lack of power. Children may feel the need to check it regularly or may become agitated if they are not allowed to use the phone without a good reason. Alzougool and Almansour (2017) opined that smartphone users react negatively to disruptions, engage with kids they love less, and respond more slowly.

Again, when parents use smartphones when spending time with their children, it implies that they are not truly present for them, which raises the possibility that they will struggle with a wide range of emotional issues. The bigger problem arises because children model their behavior after others, particularly their parents, and learn from them. This suggests that how a person act as a parent offers an outstanding role model for what their children may come to recognize as the right thing to do (Gjylbegaj & Abdi, 2019).

Children might develop a preference for their telephones above interpersonal encounters and developing relationships. Their social care, health, and family ties may all be significantly impacted by this. Also, children will exhibit poor behavior and have fewer pleasant interactions as a result of distracted parenting caused by their parents' usage of a smartphone. When parents actively use their smartphones while interacting with their children, it suggests that they are not there when they are, which raises the possibility that they will struggle with a range of emotional issues (Valk et al., 2010). According to Romero et al., (2017) the common practice of making use of smartphones while eating supper together is a constant pain when it comes to preserving strong family bonds It has little impact on this vital family time and downplays the importance of relationships and human welfare. The use of a smartphone takes up time, but it also leads to addiction. The obsession with the phone may manifest as a complete lack of interest in spending even a minute with one's spouse or children. This is a symptom of a cell phone addiction. Additionally, a study by McDaniel (2019) discovered that having a conversation with someone else while ignoring them (a practice known as "phubbing") can lead to less satisfying results in a couple's relationship. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the effect of smartphone use on family communication among residents of Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers state.

Statement of the problem

Smartphones usage has taken centre stage in the lives of many individuals. Smartphones have become an indispensable tool to them such that they spend hours on the various platforms the phones can offer. Many people both young and old prefer spending time on their smartphones instead of interacting with loved ones, friend and family or associate outside their immediate family, making it

difficult for them to communicate, understand each other, make new friends and socialize more.

In fact, the rate at which people engage in the use of smartphones is so alarming that it has raised serious concern in the mind of the researcher, a situation where a parent spends reasonable number of hours in a day on the smartphones for various purposes instead of interacting with their spouse and children. Again, many families today appear to have lost connection amongst each other; children prefer pressing their smartphones and spending time surfing the internet and social networking sites instead of interacting with their parents and siblings, parents are no longer able to monitor the children/ward activities nor have control of whom they mingle and interact with, creating a huge vacuum in the "original" family system. These and many other unfavourable situations in the family is a direct result of poor or ineffective communication among family members. Based on the foregoing, it therefore becomes pertinent to examine how use of smartphones affects family communication patterns among residents in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers state.

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The study aims at examining the effects of use of smartphones on family communication among residents in Obior/Akpor LGA, Rivers state. It specifically seeks to:

1. examine how use of smartphones affect verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state.
2. determine how use of smartphones affect non verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state.
3. ascertain how use of smartphones affects listening ability among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state.
4. examine how use of smartphone affects interpersonal relationships among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state.

Research Questions

1. How does use of smartphones affect verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

2. How does use of smartphones affect non verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?
3. How does use of smartphones affect listening ability among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?
4. How does use of smartphones affect interpersonal relationships among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

Empirical Review

Egielewa and Umolu (2023) study on digital-mediated communication: effect of smartphone use on family communication in Nigeria. The study examined the extents to which smartphone usage impacts 1,086 family members with children who are at least seven years old and own at least one smartphone in Nigeria. Using quantitative research, the study deployed the questionnaire to respondents at their homes, churches, mosques and wedding ceremonies between 15th April and 15th May 2022. Based on the rational choice theory and the family system theory, this research finds out that smartphone eases communication, but negatively affected normal conversation especially sleep, meal and relaxation times for both parents and children. Also, the study shows that smartphone is gradually shifting the medium of family communication from relational to digital as more family members communicate using the smartphone than interpersonally. The research concludes that smartphone usage affects family communication negatively and recommends the moderation of smartphone use in the family and the search for alternative platforms for family communication that minimizes smartphone addiction. Seo and Bang (2017) measured smartphone addiction in nursing students and determined the relationship between smartphone addiction and family communication. Research suggested factors behind smartphone addiction like smartphone usage time, life stress, the importance of smartphones in their lives, and family communication, and statistical analysis showed that smartphone addiction correlated significantly with life stress and negatively correlated with family communication (r=-.26). Sinsomsack and Kulachai (2018) studied the impacts of smartphone addiction on mental health, family relationships, social relationships, and academic performance in high school students. Results indicated a positive relationship between mood disorders and smartphone addiction. Results also revealed that smartphone addicts' students have poor social interaction and also poor relationships with their families. They rarely

communicate with family members since they are busy with smartphones. The study also revealed negative consequences of smartphone addiction on health like neck pain, finger pain. Smartphone addict students also have poor academic performance. Lee (2016) researched to understand the effect of parent-son/daughter communications on the addiction to smartphones, with stress level, self-control, and self-efficacy as the mediator. His study showed that smartphone addiction had negative correlations with parent-son/daughter communication, self-control, and self-efficacy but had positive correlations with stress levels. In addition, parent-son/daughter communication influenced the degree of smartphone addiction, with stress level, self-control, and self-efficacy as the mediator. Bian and Leung (2014) research shows that the symptoms of smartphone addiction are significantly and negatively related to the level of face-to-face communication. Results also showed that smartphone addicts scored high on loneliness and shyness. Using exploratory faction analysis, they identified five symptoms of addiction like disregard of harmful consequences, preoccupation, inability to control craving, productivity loss, and feeling anxious and lost. Pugh (2017) investigated the possible relationship between smartphone addiction, self-esteem, social anxiety, gender, and age. Analysis revealed no significant relationship between smartphone addiction, self-esteem, and social anxiety. However, age and gender differences were found between the variables examined. Females scored higher on smartphone addiction and social anxiety than males. A negative relationship was found between smartphone addiction and age. Gladden (2016) investigated the daily usage of smartphones by individuals in different age groups and also its effects on individuals in real-life social interactions. The results showed that the majority of respondents spend 3-5 hours a day using their smartphones, with 75% of respondents saying that they mostly used Instagram and Facebook. The conclusion indicated that individuals with the age range 18-30 are the ones most affected in their social interactions because they relied on smartphones. Pearson and Hussain (2016) examined the relationship between narcissism, personality, and smartphone addiction. Analysis revealed a positive relationship between smartphone addiction and narcissism personality and daily use of smartphones and length of ownership. The study also revealed that age and narcissism, openness, neuroticism personalities were linked to smartphone addiction. Tajalli and Zarnaghash (2017) investigated the role of family communication patterns including consensual, pluralistic, protective, and

laissez-faire, on internet addiction. Their study showed that children with laissez-faire family patterns have the highest levels of using the internet. These families rarely engage in conversation and children use the internet as an escape from these conflicts. In contrast, pluralistic families, high on conversation orientation, scored significantly lowest on internet use. These families allow children to express their thoughts freely. It prevents them from psychological problems and internet addiction. The analysis further showed a positive relationship between conversation orientation and a negative relationship of conformity orientation with Internet addiction. This research also indicated problems that are both causes and effects of internet addiction such as lack of family responsibility, absence of family support, family isolation, failure in job and education, and the feeling of worthlessness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Technological determinism theory and social cognitive theory

The technological determinism theory was coined by Thorstein Verblen and was made popular by Marshal MacLuhan in the 1960s. The theory postulates that technology and communication shapes and directs the way people think, act and feel, and how societies mobilize and organize themselves and operate.

The advancement in information and communication technology and the invention of the use of internet on mobile phones has greatly changed the human society. Today, people no longer pursue information rather information pursues them. Obiora and Asadu (2015) had noted that 'the use of mobile phones for mass dissemination of information has changed the society tremendously'. Adler, et al (2001) quoted Macluhan's idea on Technological Determination (TD). To simply put it, it is the idea that technology has important effects in our lives. This idea figures prominently in the popular imagination and political rhetoric, for example in the idea that the Internet is revolutionizing the economy and society. Hence, Facebook enables users to create social change whether it is negative or positive. The study showed how teens change their behavior when they are engaging in SNS. Teenagers update and post everyday on issues relating to fashion trends, body image, the hottest hangout, or sports. They seek attention from the feedback or comments they receive to build up or enhance their self-esteem. They can feel

pleasure, obtain a good self-image and disclose opinions which in turn, can be confirmed by other people's opinion about their particular post (Hill, 2015). In the case of social media, Facebook becomes part of a person's life and within the family, the siblings, particularly the teens, are more prone to this kind of behaviour. In addition, it is quite obvious that with mobile phone and other internet gadgets, people can do a whole lot of things such as watching videos/films, sending pictures, recording and downloading music as well as reading online newspaper publications. An indication that there is a paradigm shift in communication channels which has cause change in the perception of individuals and the society at large, and also the way relationships are established and maintained.

Social cognitive theory on the other hand is a learning theory developed by the renowned Stanford psychology professor Albert Bandura. The theory provides a framework for understanding how people actively shape and is shaped by their environment. In particular, the theory details the processes of observational learning and modeling, and the influence of self-efficacy on the production of behavior. Moreover, social cognitive theory assigns a central role to perceived efficacy in managing different aspects of daily relationships, interactions, and tasks within the system (Bandura, 2006). Specifically, family collective efficacy is "members' beliefs in the capabilities of their family to work together to promote each other's development and well-being, maintain beneficial ties to extrafamilial systems, and to exhibit resilience to adversity" (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Regalia and Scabini, 2011). Study by Caprara, Regalia, Scabini, Barbaranelli and Bandura (2004) showed that higher collective family efficacy associates with higher family satisfaction, open communication, effective parental monitoring, and lower aggressive management of conflicts and communication problems. Such an efficacy plays a key role in managing demands and issues related to parenthood (Bandura, 2006) representing a protective factor helping parents to get positive outcomes for their family system as a whole. With reference to family relationships, the most recent literature has deepened the understanding of the impact that social media can have on them with specific attention to particular family tasks, challenges and phases of family life. Social media use via smartphones can specifically be a central issue for families facing adolescence evolutionary tasks (Bacigalupe and Lambe, 2011; Caplan, 2003; Kim, Lau, Cheuk,

Kan, Hui and Griffiths, 2010) which also refer to adolescents' negotiation of autonomy and independence within the family system and to the significance of peer relationships (Scotto di Luzio, Procentese and Guillet-Descas, 2014). Indeed, given that nowadays, adolescents spend significant amounts of time using social media via smartphones with a variety of goals, scholars often talk about Generation Media when referring to modern adolescents (Carvalho, Francisco and Relvas, 2015). It is true that use of smartphones and social media can provide positive results in terms of family cohesion, adaptability, and open communications (Jabeen, Sarvat and Hashmi, 2021) and can have a positive impact on family relationships too by allowing family members to keep in touch, make plans in real-time, ensure children's safety as they allow communications in emergency situations (Zhong, 2013), strengthen family ties, encourage parent–child interactions, and promote and facilitate discussions (Procentese and Gatti, 2019). Moreover, ICTs and social media use could increasingly ensure what Bisen and Deshpande (2016) defined as autonomy in security conditions, as they help parents in communicating with their children at any time, checking their movements in physical and online spaces (Patel and FAPA, 2015). It is also evident that the information and communication technologies (ICTs) are profoundly changing the ways in which people behave and relate to each other (Rasheed, 2015) and creating conflicting perceptions about their impact. As they have become cultural practices embedded in everyday life relationships (Zencirci, Aygar, Göktaş, Önsüz, Alaiye and amp; Metintaş, 2018) their contribution to creating richer and more complex patterns of interactions, including to family life, cannot be ignored (Stafford and Hillyer, 2012); however, whether the effects of these new forms of interactions on the functioning of family systems are positive or negative is still unclear. The present study therefore seeks to ascertain the influence of smartphone usage on family communication. Herein lies the relationship between this theory and the present study.

Methodology

The study employed survey design. A sample size of 384 was selected from a population of 947,625 residents of Obio/Akpor using Krejcie and Morgan sample determination table. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were adopted to select respondents. A researcher designed questionnaire structured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly

(SD) weighted in scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively, was validated and used to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument for the study was subjected to face and content validity and the Pearson Moment Correlational Coefficient (PPMC) was used to establish a reliability coefficient of 0.76. The data collected from the respondents were collated, coded and analyzed using mean statistics.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Research Question One: How does use of smartphones affect verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

Table 4.1: Mean Statistics on how use of smartphones affects verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1.	Use of smartphone has improved m to-face communication with my F members	170	97	57	55	3.00	Strongly Agreed
2.	Use of smartphone has improved my word selection during conversation with my family members	144	143	71	22	3.08	Strongly Agreed
3.	Use of smartphone has made me not to be mindful of my choice of words during conversation with my family members	41	47	113	179	1.87	Strongly Disagree
4.	Use of smartphone has made me to be mindful of my tone whenever I am communicating with my family members	164	189	27	0	3.36	Strongly Agreed
5.	Use of smartphone has made me talk as I like when communicating with my family members	31	63	103	183	1.85	Strongly Disagree
Grand Total						2.63	**Agreed**

The data from Table 4.1 shows that use of smartphones does not exact negative effect on verbal communication among family members.

Research Question Two: How does use of smartphones affect nonverbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

Table 4.2: Mean statistics on how use of smartphones affects nonverbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1.	Use of smartphone has created some distance a my family members, thus depre communication among family members	24	8	188	160	1.73	Strongly Disagreed
2.	Use of smartphone has bridged the distance my family members thereby imp communication among us.	115	171	90	4	3.04	Strongly Agreed
3.	Use of smartphones has made family members to appreciate more their physical environment, thus improving communication among them	158	155	47	20	3.19	Strongly Agreed
4.	Use of smartphone has made family members to no longer appreciate their immediate environment, hence, negatively affecting communication among them	65	8	189	118	2.05	Disagreed
Grand Total						2.50	Agreed

Table 4.2 evaluates how use of smartphones affects nonverbal communication among family members. The result of the analysis indicates that use of smartphones exact positive effect on nonverbal communication among family members.

Research Question Three: How does use of smartphones affect listening ability among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

Table 4.3: Mean statistics on how use of smartphones affects listening ability among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1.	Use of smartphone has improved my concentration level when communicating with my family members	3	178	20	179	2.01	Disgreed
2.	Use of smartphone has decreased my concentration level when communicating with my family members	196	105	79	0	3.31	Strongly Agreed
3.	Use of smartphone has helped me to be more tolerant during communication with my family members	27	90	171	92	2.14	Disagreed
4.	Use of smartphone has made me intolerant during communication with my family members	124	97	81	71	2.68	Agreed
5.	Use of smartphone has helped me to be sensitive to others feeling during communication	67	103	129	81	2.40	Disagreed
6.	Use of smartphone has made me insensitive to others feeling during communication	83	166	84	47	2.75	Agreed
Grand Total						2.55	**Agreed**

Table 4.3 examined how use of smartphone affects listening ability among family members. The result reveals that use of smartphone has negatively affect listening ability among family members .

Research Question Four: How does use of smartphones affect interpersonal relationships among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state?

Table 4.4: Mean statistics on how use of smartphone affects interpersonal relationships among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
1.	The combination of more frequent smartphone use and face-to-face communication among family members increases their positive feelings towards one another	159	115	30	76	2.94	Agreed
2.	Use of smartphone increase physical distance between family members and decrease regular association and communication	151	141	49	39	3.06	Strongly Agreed
3.	Smartphone usage while in the presence of family members, introduces the conditions to misinterpret messages within relationships by being distracted, inattentive and possibly missing non-verbal cues given during conversation.	164	106	17	93	2.89	Agreed
4.	Social media via smartphone allow individuals opportunities to reach out to friends and family members that they do not reside with	120	173	81	6	3.07	Strongly Agreed
5.	Smartphone usage for communication purposes, leads to low level of communication in the home and also increase the feeling of loneliness and depression.	224	84	50	22	3.34	Strongly Agreed
6.	Excessive use of social media is leading youths and adolescents to spend large portion of their time in bedrooms instead of with family and friends. This in turn is causing a more individualized and socially excluded generation.	136	156	56	32	3.04	Strongly Agreed
Grand Total						3.06	**Strongly Agreed**

This table investigates how the use of smartphone affects interpersonal relationship among family members. The data analysed showed smartphone

usage exact both positive and negative effect on interpersonal relationship among family members.

Discussion of Findings

Effect of smartphones usage on verbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

The first research question evaluates how use of smartphones affects verbal communication among family members. The result of the analysis reveals that use of smartphones exact positive effect on family communication. Verbal communication, encompassing language, tone, and clarity, is a fundamental aspect of human interaction. The way we use words-their selection, order, and the nuances they carry-can drastically influence how our message is received. The tone of voice, whether it's warm, cold, sarcastic, or sincere, adds another layer of meaning, often conveying emotions and attitudes that plain text cannot. Clarity in verbal communication is equally critical. It ensures the message is understood as intended, preventing misunderstandings.

Similarly, word choice plays a pivotal role in communication. The right words can inspire, persuade, and convey empathy, while poorly chosen words can cause confusion, offense, or misinterpretation.

Families represent not only environments wherein their members live but also whole complex social systems. It is where members of the system are involved to meet their needs, make decisions, define goals, and establish rules for themselves and for the system as a whole. Hence, effective communication is very imperative in every family. Effective communication is pivotal in shaping our personal, professional and social lives in our interconnected world. Whether it's nurturing relationships, succeeding in the workplace or engaging in community activities, the way we communicate determines the quality and effectiveness of our interactions.

It is evident that the information and communication technologies (ICTs) are profoundly changing the ways in which people behave and relate to each other and creating conflicting perceptions about their impact. As they have become cultural practices embedded in everyday life relationships, their contribution to

creating richer and more complex patterns of interactions, including to family life, cannot be ignored (Stafford and Hillyer, 2012).

This finding corroborates Jabeen, Sarvat and Hashmi (2021) which found that use of smartphones and social media can provide positive results in terms of family cohesion, adaptability, and open communications and can have a positive impact on family relationships too by allowing family members to keep in touch, make plans in real-time, ensure children's safety as they allow communications in emergency situations. The present finding equally agrees with Procentese and Gatti (2019) which found that use of social media via smartphones strengthen family ties, encourage parent–child interactions, and promote and facilitate discussions among family members.

Effect of smartphones usage on nonverbal communication among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

The second objective of the study was to examine how use of smartphones affects non verbal communication among family members. The finding reveals that use of smartphones exact positive effect on family communication. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures, is a powerful, often subconscious, element of communication. These non-verbal cues can reveal true feelings and intentions more accurately than spoken words. For example, a person's crossed arms, lack of eye contact, or fidgeting can indicate discomfort or disinterest, even if their words suggest otherwise.

The importance of non-verbal communication lies in its ability to complement or contradict what is being said. A nod while saying "yes" reinforces agreement, while a shake of the head during agreement indicates a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. Imagine a scenario where a person says they're happy, but their facial expression is sad and their posture slumped. This incongruence might prompt the listener to probe deeper, understanding that the spoken words do not fully convey the person's emotional state.

The present finding proves that appropriate use of smartphone can promote peaceful cohesion not only among family members but also the entire community. This is because it helps bridged the distance among my family members thereby

improving communication among them and also help people appreciate their physical environment, put people at ease, build trust among them and draw them close to each other making the flow of communication a lot easier.

Effect of smartphones usage on listening ability among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

The third finding of the study reveals that use of smartphone has negatively affected listening skills among family members by decreasing their concentration level during communication, making them to be more intolerant and insensitive to others feeling during communication. Effective listening is a crucial, yet often overlooked, component of communication. It involves actively paying attention, understanding, responding, and remembering what is being said. Unlike passive hearing, active listening requires the listener to fully engage and process the information.

Active listening works because it fosters a sense of respect and understanding between the communicators. It makes the speaker feel heard and valued, leading to more open and honest communication. Effective communicators practice active listening as it helps in accurately receiving and interpreting messages, which is essential in all forms of communication. Effective listening is not just beneficial but essential for success in both personal and family settings. Good listening ability is the building blocks of impactful and meaningful interactions, it helps people express themselves better and understand others more deeply.

The art of active listening contribute to a comprehensive communication skill set. By honing this skill, we open doors to stronger relationships, improved family dynamics, and more effective social interactions. Remember, communication is not just about speaking; it's about ensuring our message is heard, understood, and valued.

Sadly, use of smartphone has negatively affected listening ability among family members thus negatively affecting family communication. The present finding corroborates Lee (2016) study which found that use of smartphone negatively affects parent-son/daughter communication. The study equally agrees with Gladden (2016) study which found that daily usage of smartphones by individuals

in different age groups affects individuals in real-life social interactions and family communication.

Effect of smartphones usage on interpersonal relationship among family members in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers state

The fourth findings of the study revealed that use of smartphone exact both positive and negative influences on family communication. Positively, the study found that the combination of more frequent social media use and face-to-face communication among family members increases their positive feelings towards one another and that social media allow individuals opportunities to reach out to friends and family members that they do not reside with.

Negative, the study revealed that use of social media increase physical distance between friends and family members and decrease regular association and communication; social media usage while in the presence of friends and family members, introduces the conditions to misinterpret messages within relationships by being distracted, inattentive and possibly missing non-verbal cues given during conversation; high social media usage for communication purposes, leads to low level of communication in the home and also increase the feeling of loneliness and depression; and that excessive use of social media is leading youths and adolescents to spend large portion of their time in bedrooms instead of with family and friends. This in turn is causing a more individualized and socially excluded generation.

This finding is in tandem with Jain, (2010) finding that social media have positive or negative effect on the users psyche, since users may compare their relationships and successes in life to other users lives. A study conducted by Kraut, Kielser, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson & Crawford (2002), measuring the impact of social and psychological involvement regarding Internet usage and well-being, found a relationship between the greater usage of the Internet and the declines in the communication between family members within a home. The study further suggested that Internet usage can result in the reduction of family communication and face-to-face interaction. The findings of Kraut et al, implies that social media exact negative influence on interpersonal relationship.

The study by Nugent (2013) on the other hand revealed that social media usage and communication influences the type of interaction methods of socialization within a person's environment, and that it is now a practice to communicate and resolve conflicts through SMS communication in everyday life. This finding implies that smartphone usage exact positive influence on interpersonal relationship. The forgoing clearly shows that the type and level of influence smartphone usage exact on an individuals' interpersonal relationship depends on how he/she uses the phone.

Conclusion

The major concern of this study was to ascertain if use of smartphone exact any effect on the way family members communicate among each other as well as on their interpersonal relationships amongst themselves., it was found that although use of smartphones has does not have negative effect on verbal and nonverbal communication among family members, it significantly affects their listening ability causing it to have both positive and negative effects on interpersonal relationships among them. Based on the findings, the study therefore concludes that smartphone usage have both positive and negative effects on family communication. Thus, family members should be mindful of how they use the various platforms available to them via the smartphones to enable them harness the positive opportunities the platforms offer especially as it concerns the importance of communication amongst people and also ensure that the use of these phones does not negatively influence their interpersonal relationships not just with their family members but among other people in the society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations were made

1. Family members should continue to engage more on face-to-face communication, this will not only strengthen their bonds but also enhance their ability to communicate freely and possibly reduce the dangers use of smartphones may have on their verbal communications.
2. Non verbal cues can help in communicating with children when verbal communication appears not to be very effective, therefore parents and guidance also need to monitor the children closely to know what activities they engage in online to avoid negative influences.

3. Listening is a key part of communication that doesn't involve just hearing what someone says, but also actively understanding what they say. Family members should realize this and try as must as possible to reduce the time they spent using their smartphones and listen more to others, will improve the family's communication and strengthen their family bonds.
4. Family members should also be guided on how to balance virtual interactions with face-to-face interaction to avoid missing out on the fundamentals of face-to-face interactions.

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