Technology in Communication for Military Personnel towards Family Bonding

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Abstract

This is a conceptual study on the impact of external factors on the technology of communication in new media as the medium of communication for family bonding among military personnel. The study reviews issues such as emotional problems, feeling of marginalisation and difficulty in managing households. Hence, the military organisation is an institution where the family is part of the management's responsibility whenever the military personnel encounter challenges, especially when they are serving overseas operations. Subsequently, this study will analyse the new media's role as a medium of communication that consists of interactive conversation, social sharing and reputation of emotions that give direct impact towards the stability of marriage. However, there are not many studies found on the technology factor as a mediator relates to the role of new media as the medium of communication with family bonding. The theories and related literatures will explain how the relationship affects the medium of communication and family bonding. Furthermore, the findings of the study will include the important factors on the perceptions (interactive conversation, social sharing, and reputations of emotions) that are influential towards the marriage of military personnel when they are away or have changed over time. The conclusions drawn highlight that the technology of new media contributes as a mediator for the relationship between the medium of communication and family bonding. This study offers recommendations for future research on how to strengthen better family bonding among military personnel serving overseas.

Keywords: military, communication, management, technology, family bonding

1. Introduction

During the performance of military deployment, military personnel use computer and communication technologies to operate military vehicles and equipment, brief military leaders, and communicate in garrison and on the battlefield. Military organisations, service members, and veteran service organisations use social media and other communication technologies for multiple purposes. Military organisations use the Facebook, Twitter, Google, mobile applications (apps), email, and text messages to communicate with military personnel, veterans, their families, the general population, government and community organisations, and prospective recruits for the military service (Matthews-Juarez, Juarez & Faulkner, 2013). Military service members and their families adopt these similar technologies for everyday communications, and to communicate during prolonged separations, overseas assignments, and combat deployments.

In the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that the local, national,

and global spaces are becoming obsolete (Harvey, 1990). All these innovations in digital media, or so-called new media, have changed and continue to change the way we think, act, and live for example, digitalization as a hybridisation of print and electronic media in a binary code that converts analogue to digital, requiring a completely different mode of production and distribution.

Fidler (1997) defined the new media as "all emerging forms of communication media." Olise (2008) added that the new media are related with the convergence of computer technology and telecommunications technologies. According to Ikpe & Olise (2010), the new media are new communication technologies that combine the computers and telecommunication technologies, and are used as channels for the dissemination of information to a heterogeneous audience regardless of the time, space and distance. There are different examples of the new media such as the Internet, mobile phones, videoconferencing, e-mail, chat rooms, and online newspapers or newsmagazines among the host of others.

The new media refers to borderless information technology which is widened by expanding the social network to build an industry network. Relationships built through the Internet, email and telephone are just at the fingertips. The most popular social network started in 2003 that is Myspace, followed by Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006. Nowadays, everybody talks about the impact of "Pokemon Go", but if we look into it seriously, the new media actually bring family together and strengthen the bond when they share the same interest. The social media encourage writing in the virtual world as well. Blogging for instance, is a popular communication relationship network. The new media change the pattern of life. The effect of social media on our ability to interact and communicate is evident in all areas of society. According to Arto Mustajoki (2007), the main cases are misunderstanding (the recipient understands the utterance differently from what the speaker meant) and non-understanding of a phrase (the recipient fails altogether to understand what the speaker said). Miscommunication and communication failure are wider concepts, also including, among others, non-listening, mishearing, and non-hearing.

Adler (1991) explained that every communication involves a message sender and a message receiver. Cross-cultural communication takes place when a person from one culture communicates with another person of different culture. Miscommunication occurs whenever the person from a different culture does not receive, misevaluates or misinterprets the sender's intended message. A message cannot be expressed at one go and needs two ways to understand it. It has to be properly structured in order to convey the message in the most desired form. Your body movements, language, expressions and gestures are actually the codes of the message, and have to be accurate, or otherwise the message gets distorted and the recipient will never be able to decode the correct information. This will influence the marriage life if the new media are used incorrectly.

2. Medium of Communication

i. Interactive Conversation

Although communication via social media has numerous advantages (e.g., convenience, easy access, low-cost), research has identified several possible challenges associated with its use, including the risks of miscommunication, harm to relationships, unhealthy social comparison, privacy breaches, exposure to danger (e.g., cyberbullying), leaks of sensitive information, and the spread of rumours (Research Outreach, 2015). In addition, research has also documented links between social media use and both positive and negative indicators of wellbeing, demonstrating the need for further research in this area.

According to a research by Olson and Poland (2004), the new media have four main advantages namely interactivity, manipulation, repurposing of the media content, creating a virtual world and generating new concepts (Chen, 2007). The lack of communication among couples is one of the serious factors and reasons among husbands and wives in divorce cases. It is a major reason compared to other divorce reasons. A weak and ineffective communication will lead to misunderstanding whereby a person will be uncertain and does not understand the messages that the other person intends to convey. This will then cause misinterpretation and giving the wrong answers. Relationship strategies founded by warlords like Sun Tzu can be applied in managing family bonding. Communication problems that exist among couples can be solved with the warlords' principles.

ii. Social Sharing

Chen (2007) indicated that the impact of digital or new media on human society is demonstrated in the aspects of cognition, social effect, and a new form of aesthetics. The distance factor is not taken into consideration as military personnel feel that everyone should be treated equally. Military personnel communicate in the same form and trait with their spouses, lovers, fiancés or life partners.

However, the military personnel are not aware of the differences with their attitudes and practices as these have been assimilated within themselves. There are also military individuals who have gentle and highly sensitive souls, who tend to consider all factors in establishing intimate relationships. The media dwelled on the possibility of chemical warfare during the Gulf War, instilling fear in service members and their families (Hobfoll, 1991). Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, rumours and incomplete information have clouded media reports and may have created panic and undue stress among our citizens (http://helping.apa.org/daily/ terrorism.html). Logically, these rumours may have affected service members and influenced how their families react to the impending separations.

Social support networks can also cause emotional outburst when news are received. Family members need to normalise daily life to support each other. To proceed successfully through the reunion phase, family members must negotiate a balance between independence and attachment to individuals in the support network that they utilised during separation. If balance is not maintained, support network relationships (e.g., close friends, relatives) could undermine the emotional intimacy of the marital relationship (Vormbrock, 1993).

iii. Reputation of Emotions

This involves spiritual relationships such as religion, emotions such as love, respecting each other and to be responsible. The Attachment Theory, according to a research conducted by Bretherton and Sroufe and Waters is important as children need their parents during the growing-up period. The Attachment Theory is a collaboration by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). Drawing on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysts, John Bowlby formulated the basic tenets of the theory. He thereby revolutionised our thinking about a child's tie to the mother and its disruption through separation, deprivation, and bereavement. Mary Ainsworth's innovative methodology not only made it possible to test some of Bowlby's ideas empirically, but had also helped expand the theory itself and is responsible for some of the new directions it is now taking. A study by Sbarra and Emery (2005) found that the emotional effect is the main effect of divorce which includes the feeling of anger, sadness, guilt, regret, relief, hope and joy. However, this effect could also bring negative effects such as conflict among the husband, wife or children. The community network between an individual with another individual and the individual with the society also influences communication when an individual

has a high level of knowledge and spreads the communication wings to a higher level which will influence thinking and a more extensive social intercourse with the existence of the new media.

iv. Family Bonding

It is crucial that family members are able to manage pressure from routine separation to maintain the values of both the family and military institution. According to a research by an American anthropologist, Gavin W Jones who had written in "Divorce in Islamic South East Asia", the number of divorce cases in West Jawa, Indonesia recorded a drastic decrease in 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s with the increase of household income. Previously, when their socio-economic status was lower, the number of divorce cases in the area was so high. The findings of the study demonstrated that the strengthening of family economy through sufficient income gain becomes the yardstick of a family's welfare which decreases the risk of divorce.

Military personnel face stress such as moving from one place to another due to work demand. This includes geographical segregation and the lack of extended family support system, and the potential of military personnel to be assigned to a completely different environment. Even though stress can be managed well when being alone, many military personnel's family members face stress (Black, 1993). For instance, it leaves family members in a great pressure when military personnel are assigned for certain duties away from their family.

Family members who could not manage the separation period will lead to the weakening of the family system. Domestic violence cases, neglect of wife and children, abuse of wife, abuse of husband (mentally especially), abuse of children, and divorce cases are among the examples that reflect disorganised condition and the core reason for the destruction of the family system and marriage. The decrease of support system from the extended family is mostly caused by the way the family is shaped.

3. Technology Factors

Social interaction in the cyber space has changed the form of social network in the physical space, especially the gathering places of family and friends The Kaiser Family Foundation (2008) found that technology factor allows 24 hours media access and the amount of time required increases, especially among the youths. Castells (2011) mentioned that the technology development in this information

age changes the old form of network that was previously based on the organisation of human experiences to digital network that enables expansion and non-stop reconfiguration taking over the traditional network limit in managing difficulties when facing a bigger network size. In fact, this medium creates a virtual community in a borderless world. The technology factor can also be the mediator to bring impact to family bonding, both positively and negatively. This shows that the idea of a global village by McLuhan and network community by Castells (2011) and Van Djik (2006) has become a reality as the new media make the world smaller and distance becomes nearer compared to the past.

4. Theories Related

i. Technological Determinism Theory

According to Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), technological determinism is "the belief that technologies have an overwhelming power to drive human actions" in which it leads to social change. It is evident that media relations practitioners must understand that the new media technologies when properly harnessed, are capable of transforming the media relations practice. The new media technologies by their very nature are drivers of social change, national development and organisational development.

The various media of communication and their gatekeepers on the other hand, have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination task as posited by development media theorists that include ensuring that organisations operate objectively and present positive information to the world (Ikpe & Olise, 2010). This is possible as technological transformations of the new media technologies can now overlap with some contemporary tools for media relations, and the relationship between the media and organisations in the practice of media relations must be sustained and maintained mutually.

ii. Domestication of Media

Domestication of media focuses on the processes by which technological innovations are "tamed" and appropriated by specific user communities, especially the families. It offers reflection on how technology choices are informed and constrained by the "moral economy" or a set of values held in common within a household or user community (Silverstone, 1992). It seeks to distinguish decision-making that occurs at different phases of this process

including those of appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion of a given technology into the lives of a given group. Domestication highlights the need to consider how values and beliefs of a given group constrain and inform technological adoption and innovation. It can also be used as a way to identify the key motivation used to inform a given user community's technological priorities.

iii. Social Network Theory

Another theory related to relationship that can be analysed by network analysis (or social network theory) is by Everett Rogers/Jan van Dijk who studied on how social structures and relationships around a person, group, or organisation affect beliefs or behaviours. This approach is important as it outlines how many people live within multiple loosely-connected social networks in the contemporary society and how relationships are constituted and maintained within the network. The approach also recognises that a shift in the society from tightly-bounded social systems and communities formed on the basis of family, institutional and geographic relations to loosely-bounded relations based on flexible and dynamic social networks. Rogers (1986) characterised a communication network as consisting of "interconnected individuals who are linked by patterned communication flows". The network analysis seeks to consider how people connect and relate to one another, and thereby create an interpersonal and relational communication structure.

5. Conclusion

The technology of the new media contributes as a mediator for the relationship between the mediums of communication for family bonding among military personnel. Participatory media culture means that there are low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, and thus people are able to more easily respond, contribute and critique media messages and meanings. This process of interaction also creates some degrees of social connection with others involved in media consumption and creation. Theologian would benefit from considering the new possibilities and challenges offered by the trend towards presumption that changes the audience's understanding of authority, agency and interpretative process.

The impact of the integration of the new media and globalization can be summarised into five precise effects namely, a shrinking world, the compression of time and space, close interaction in

different aspects of society, global connectivity, and accelerated local/global competition/cooperation (Chen & Starosta, 2000). In other words, the boundaries of human societies in terms of space, time, scope, structure, geography, function, profession, value, and beliefs are swiftly changing and transforming into a new pattern of similarities and interconnectedness.

It is apparent that the media does affect the way a family unit socialises and as a result, their relationships. Without boundaries of time and place, features of technological devices allow individuals to foster familial bonds and relationships by creating the perpetual ability to connect with others. While this is one of the best aspects of the media, it also has the potential to negatively affect personal family contact, hindering face-to-face interactions and social involvement.

Acknowledgments

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