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SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION AND PANDEMIC EFFECTS: A CASE STUDY OF OFFICE EMPLOYEES AT BERJAYA LANGKAWI RESORT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on social communication satisfaction among office employees at Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort. Pandemics, like COVID-19, lead to measures such as movement control orders, significantly impacting social interaction and potentially causing loneliness and isolation. The research aimed to examine the relationship between the pandemic's impact and social communication satisfaction, and to identify any differences based on age and gender. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a questionnaire distributed to 108 employees out of 150 targeted, who experienced working from home. The questionnaire collected data on respondent background, the effects of the pandemic, and social communication satisfaction. Instrument reliability was confirmed through a pre-test, with acceptable Cronbach's alpha values for all variables (Effects of Pandemic = .802; Social Communication Satisfaction = .761). Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between the impact of the pandemic and social communication satisfaction ($r = .326**$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that pandemic conditions indeed affect communication satisfaction. While no significant difference in social communication satisfaction was found based on age ($F = .636$, $p > .05$), a significant difference was observed based on gender (Sig. = .000), implying that gender plays a role in social communication satisfaction during the pandemic. This research underscores the importance of social connection as a fundamental human need, consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and contributes valuable insights into pandemic-related communication challenges for future studies.

1.0 INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

Social Communication Satisfaction is defined as an emotional feeling derived from the effectiveness of communication interactions among stakeholders. For this research, it is specifically described as communication between individuals such as friends, colleagues, or neighbors, which is a vital component in life enabling peace of mind and desired interaction. This concept is crucial to society as individuals develop a helpful interpersonal communication system and build relationships through mutual interactions, activities, and impacts. A strong social support network, which is a result of effective social communication, equips a person to deal with various life issues. However, a significant problem related to social communication satisfaction during the pandemic is the inability to achieve this sense of satisfaction in social interactions. The main issues include reduced face-to-face engagement, increased reliance on mediated platforms like Zoom and Skype, and less overall interaction with people outside one's immediate household. What is lacking or unsolved in this issue is the long-term impact of extended Movement Control Orders (MCOs), which can lead to social isolation and loneliness, known to have negative effects on various ailments such as cardiovascular, inflammatory, neuroendocrine, and cognitive disorders.

The second significance of social communication satisfaction in today's environment, particularly during a pandemic, lies in its direct link to an individual's psychological well-being and ability to achieve a high-quality existence through extensive and close social communication. It is viewed as a crucial aspect that, if lacking, can cause significant problems. For instance, families, consisting of parents and children, are severely affected by the pandemic and are likely to experience problems leading to worse situations due to reduced communication outside the house. Students, with school closures, also face social communication dissatisfaction as they cannot meet peers, which is vital for their social development. The research aims to raise awareness about these seemingly small effects that can escalate into larger, long-term problems. A research gap identified or addressed by this study is to contribute new findings regarding social communication satisfaction based on age and gender, potentially contrasting or aligning with previous research on related concepts like depression or general communication satisfaction.

The concept of social communication satisfaction significantly influences the current situation, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has drastically altered communication patterns, leading to less in-person engagement and an increased shift to digital platforms. This shift, while making people more literate in communication technologies, poses challenges to achieving satisfaction in social interactions. Furthermore, the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, as a government initiative to curb the virus spread, prohibited citizens from leaving their homes and limited social activities, directly impacting opportunities for social communication. The emotional and psychological toll of the pandemic, along with the rapid spread of unfiltered and potentially false information online, further complicates social communication, making it difficult for individuals to achieve satisfaction when engaging in discussions they are unsure about.

Social communication plays a fundamental role in human life. It enables individuals to develop a helpful interpersonal communication system and build relationships through mutual interactions, activities, and impacts. It is not solely verbal but also includes non-verbal cues like body language, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. This skill is often learned without direct teaching, acquired through experience in interacting with others. In a broader sense, social communication, encompassing social interaction, social cognition, pragmatics, and language, is essential for a high-quality existence and psychological well-being. In professional settings, communication satisfaction, a close relative of social communication satisfaction, is crucial for employee engagement and coping with organizational changes, with studies showing a positive relationship between organizational communication and job satisfaction.

Several factors influence social communication satisfaction, often with a significant impact. The most noticeable differences affecting it during the pandemic include less face-to-face, in-person engagement, the necessity of wearing masks during interactions, increased time spent on mediated platforms like Zoom and Skype, and reduced overall interaction with individuals outside one's immediate living arrangement. The long-term duration of the Movement Control Order (MCO) is also identified as a factor that could cause social communication dissatisfaction, leading to broader problems like social isolation and loneliness. These conditions can have severe negative impacts on an individual's health, contributing to cardiovascular, inflammatory, neuroendocrine, and cognitive disorders. The proliferation of unfiltered and

false information online during the pandemic also affects communication satisfaction, as people may feel criticized if they discuss unverified issues.

Previous studies have extensively explored aspects related to social communication and satisfaction. Researchers like Bhatti and Haq (2017) and Xia and Li (2018) have highlighted the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness on health. Definitions of social communication have been provided by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Adams (2005), Olswang, Coggins, and Timler (2001), and Riggio (2003), emphasizing its role in using language appropriately and interpreting situations, and connecting it to traits like sociability and extraversion. Its importance in childhood development and challenges faced by students with learning disabilities have also been noted by Adams (2005), Skuse (2010), Levin (2015), and Nordin (2020). Regarding communication satisfaction, Thayer (1969) defined it as personal satisfaction from communicating, while Hecht (2004) and Gray & Laidlaw (2004) described it as a socio-emotional outcome. Morele (2005) viewed it as an emotive sensation from effective interactions. Studies by Hargie & Tourish (2000), Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallois (2004), Akkirman (2005), Nakra (2006), Kandlousi (2010), Wagner (2015), Abdi (2017), Mehra (2019), and Kakkar (2021) have explored its role in organizational settings, employee well-being, and remote working. This particular study's findings, which show a relationship between the impact of the pandemic and social communication satisfaction, align with previous research by Rutherford (2017), Kemp (2020), Bozkurt (2020), Miller (2020), and Depoux (2020). However, it offers a new finding by concluding no significant difference in social communication satisfaction based on age, contrasting some past research on age and depression. Conversely, it supports past research by finding a difference in social communication satisfaction based on gender.

The study's objectives are to examine the relationship between the impact of the pandemic and social communication satisfaction, and to identify differences in social communication satisfaction based on age and gender. The purpose and implications of this research are multi-faceted. Firstly, it aims to observe, study, and raise awareness about how seemingly minor effects of the pandemic can lead to larger, long-term problems, particularly regarding social communication satisfaction. It also serves as a valuable reference for future studies on the effects of pandemics and social communication satisfaction. Furthermore, the study intends to increase public awareness about the dissatisfaction caused by the pandemic, noting that families and students are particularly vulnerable to these problems. For the researcher, conducting this study provided significant knowledge and guidance for future research, fostering awareness of the pandemic's widespread impact beyond Malaysia, and deepening understanding of social communication factors. It also allowed the researcher to learn from previous studies and gain practical experience in the chosen field.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW (HEADING 1)

2.1   Pandemic: A Literature Review

A pandemic is broadly defined as an epidemic that spreads globally or over a vast area, crossing international borders, and affecting a huge number of people. This definition is echoed by the International Epidemiology Association's Dictionary of Epidemiology (2009). Robinson (2020) further clarifies that a pandemic has a larger impact and causes more deaths than a typical epidemic. Synthesizing these perspectives, a pandemic can be understood as a worldwide contagious disease affecting multiple parties, capable of spreading across countries and continents. A key nuance from the World Health Organization (2011) is that the definition of a pandemic does not necessarily include criteria related to population immunity, virology, or illness severity. The primary differences in these definitions lie in their emphasis: the International Epidemiology Association focuses on geographic spread and scale of affected population, Robinson highlights the severity in terms of impact and mortality, while the WHO clarifies what *is not* a defining characteristic. For this research, the synthesized definition emphasizing its global, contagious, and widespread impact on a large population is most appropriate, as it directly relates to the broad societal changes and individual experiences being studied.

While pandemics are generally associated with negative outcomes, the provided sources indicate some unforeseen positive adaptations or "benefits" arising from the situation. Notably, the pandemic has led to many individuals becoming more literate in using communication technologies. This increased digital literacy can be seen as beneficial for moving forward, fostering a community more adept at adapting to changes and progress. Industry surveys during the COVID-19 epidemic revealed a significant increase in digital media consumption as people spent more time at home due to lockdowns,

indicating that communication continued, albeit with changes. This forced shift to digital platforms, while different from physical communication, has enabled continued interaction and learning.

The pandemic has played a multifaceted role in shaping global and individual experiences. It acts as a widespread disruptor, causing varied impacts across nations and severely affecting citizens through government initiatives like Movement Control Orders (MCOs), school closures, and restricted workplace and social activities. These measures, implemented to curb the spread of viruses, prohibited citizens from leaving their homes and limited social gatherings. Beyond physical restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous and global influence on social, economic, and political life, and has significantly impacted individuals emotionally and psychologically. Furthermore, the pandemic environment has inadvertently facilitated the rapid spread of unfiltered and potentially false information online, making it difficult for the public to achieve communication satisfaction when discussing unverified issues.

2.2   Social Communication Satisfaction

The impact of the pandemic on social communication satisfaction is profound and largely negative. Social communication satisfaction, defined as the inability to achieve a sense of satisfaction in social interactions, is directly affected by the pandemic's disruptions. Key changes include a reduction in face-to-face engagement, the necessity of wearing masks during interactions, an increased reliance on mediated platforms such as Zoom and Skype, and less overall interaction with individuals outside one's immediate living arrangement. The prolonged duration of Movement Control Orders (MCOs) can lead to social isolation and loneliness, which are known to have severe negative effects on health, contributing to cardiovascular, inflammatory, neuroendocrine, and cognitive disorders. The proliferation of disinformation online also hinders communication satisfaction, as people may feel criticized when discussing unverified information. Findings confirm a direct relationship between the impact of the pandemic and social communication satisfaction, with target workers experiencing differences in communication satisfaction between pre-pandemic and pandemic conditions.

2.3   Empirical Review on the Impact of Pandemic and Limitations

Previous studies have explored various facets of the pandemic's impact. Rutherford (2017) highlighted that influenza pandemics are unpredictable and can have devastating implications for society worldwide, aligning with the general understanding of the pandemic's severe drawbacks. Kemp (2020) observed that digital media consumption skyrocketed during the initial months of the COVID-19 epidemic due to lockdowns, indicating a significant shift in communication methods. Bozkurt (2020) differentiated between "distance education" and "emergency remote education," emphasizing the rapid, survival-oriented adaptation to online tools during a disaster. Miller (2020) pointed out the enormous emotional and psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on individuals, which can be evidenced by increased stress and suicide rates in some regions. Depoux (2020) noted that disinformation during the pandemic is as contagious and harmful as the virus itself, spreading rapidly and affecting communication satisfaction when individuals are unsure about the issues they discuss.

While these studies extensively cover various impacts of pandemics, the provided source does not explicitly discuss their methodological limitations. However, it implies a research gap that this particular study aims to address. Previous research established broad impacts; this study contributes new findings specifically regarding social communication satisfaction and investigates differences based on age and gender. This indicates that while the reviewed studies cover the *impact* of pandemics, they may not have focused specifically on *social communication satisfaction* or examined demographic differences in this context, thus leaving an area for further investigation.

2.4   The Concept of Pandemic Impact and Its Relationship with Societal Aspects

The concept of "Impact of Pandemic" fundamentally refers to the widespread and varied consequences a global disease outbreak has on society and individuals. A pandemic is a cynical term that portrays a situation where people live in fear and experience numerous negative effects. Historically, pandemics like the Spanish Flu and H1N1 have demonstrated their capacity to cause global fear and exert broad influence. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, necessitated stringent government measures like the Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, which directly limited citizens' movement and curtailed social, economic, and educational activities to prevent virus transmission. This governmental response, a direct outcome of the pandemic's threat, profoundly influenced daily routines and communication patterns. The pandemic's impact extends beyond physical health to encompass emotional and psychological well-being, as evidenced by increased stress and mental health challenges. It also plays a role in fostering an environment where unfiltered information and disinformation can spread rapidly, complicating social interactions and hindering communication satisfaction. Thus, the pandemic's impact is a pervasive force that compels societal adaptation, reshapes human interaction, and significantly influences psychological states

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative method to collect and analyze data, focusing on objective measurements and statistical analysis. Quantitative research is valuable for generating knowledge and insights into the social world, especially concerning phenomena affecting humans. It involves collecting numerical data to identify patterns, averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize findings to larger groups. The selection of respondents in quantitative methods is typically random to avoid bias, allowing for broader dissemination of findings. Furthermore, quantitative methods facilitate rapid data collection, as surveys can be distributed efficiently.

The study's target population comprised employees from Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort's office. This specific group was chosen because, unlike operational employees, office workers at the resort experienced work-from-home arrangements, which could have significantly affected their schedules and environments. The entire office consists of various departments, totaling 150 employees. Based on Morgan (1960)'s table for small sample techniques, a sample size of 108 respondents was deemed sufficient for this research. A non-probability, convenience sampling approach was utilized, as it allowed easy distribution of questionnaires to the selected employees.

A structured questionnaire, prepared using Google Forms, served as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Part A for respondent background (age, gender, education level, department), Part B with 17 questions on the effects of the pandemic (rated on a 1-5 scale), Part C with 18 questions assessing social communication satisfaction (using varying scales for different question types), and Part D (not detailed in the provided excerpt but implied by the questionnaire structure). Before distribution to the main sample, a pre-test was conducted on 50 working professionals from KidZania Kuala Lumpur and Kolej Universiti Poly-tech Mara Kuala Lumpur lecturers. The pre-test aimed to assess the reliability and validity of the instrument, ensuring the questionnaire was easy to understand, relevant, accurate, and appropriate for the study's objectives. The pre-test results indicated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of .802 for "effects of pandemic" and .761 for "social communication satisfaction" variables. After obtaining consent from superiors, the questionnaire was disseminated via the office's WhatsApp group for ease of access to respondents.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main study involved 109 respondents from Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort. The demographic breakdown of the respondents showed that 67% (73) were male and 33% (36) were female. In terms of education, 46.8% held a Bachelor's degree, 26.6% a Diploma, 17.4% a Master's, and 9.2% SPM level, with no PhD holders. The majority of

respondents were Malay (78%), followed by Chinese (11%), Indian (7%), and others (4%). Age distribution showed 33.9% aged 21-25, 22% aged 31-35, 17.4% aged 26-30, 16.5% aged 41-45, and 10.1% aged 36-40.

The reliability of the instruments for the main study remained acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values of .776 for "effects of pandemic" and .762 for "social communication satisfaction". Inter-item correlations for both variables were also significant, indicating internal consistency.

4.1   Hypotheses

The study proceeded to test its hypotheses:

•   Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a relation between the impact of pandemic and social communication satisfaction. The results indicated a significant positive relationship ($r = .326^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). This hypothesis was accepted, confirming that the pandemic does affect or contribute to social communication satisfaction, as target workers reported feeling the difference between working during the pandemic and under normal conditions.

•   Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a difference in social communication satisfaction based on age. The analysis showed no significant difference ($F = .636$, $p > .05$) in social communication satisfaction based on age. This hypothesis was rejected, suggesting that all age groups experienced similar impacts on their social communication satisfaction during the pandemic.

•   Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a difference in social communication satisfaction based on gender. The findings revealed a significant difference ($F = .000$, $p < .05$) in social communication satisfaction based on gender. This hypothesis was accepted, indicating that gender does play a role in how individuals experience social communication satisfaction during the pandemic.

4.2   Discussion of Findings

The research successfully achieved its primary objective by determining a significant relationship between the impact of the pandemic and social communication satisfaction. This finding aligns with previous research and is attributed to the widespread changes in daily routines and communication methods brought about by the pandemic. The shift towards online communication, despite its benefits, could not fully replace physical interaction, leading to altered social communication satisfaction. The pandemic's influence on emotional and psychological well-being, as noted by Miller (2020) and Depoux (2020) regarding disinformation, further supports this relationship.

Regarding the second objective, the study found no significant difference in social communication satisfaction based on age, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. This outcome suggests that individuals across all age groups experienced comparable challenges and adjustments during the pandemic, as movement controls and the novelty of the COVID-19 situation affected everyone universally. Both older and younger individuals were equally unfamiliar with the pandemic's impacts, necessitating similar coping mechanisms with new communication technologies. This finding, however, contrasts with some past research that identified age-related differences in issues such as depression.

For the third objective, the study identified a significant difference in social communication satisfaction based on gender, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 3. This finding is consistent with previous research. The discussion suggests that women may be more susceptible to dissatisfaction in online interactions due to a tendency to personalize comments and react emotionally to perceived slights. Such emotional responses to online exchanges, even minor ones, could lead to significant problems, such as withdrawing from social interactions.

The findings of this study contribute to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory by illustrating how pandemic-induced barriers to social communication satisfaction directly impede the fulfillment of the "love and belonging" tier. When individuals cannot maintain healthy relationships due to communication challenges, their motivation to pursue higher-level needs, such as esteem and self-actualization, is compromised. The study underscores that basic human needs, including social connection and motivation, are essential even during a pandemic, and their unfulfillment can prevent individuals from engaging in other life activities. Furthermore, the research posits that managing personal life, academic performance, and

achieving life satisfaction contribute to an individual's overall quality of life, which is intricately linked to fulfilling these foundational needs.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This research yields several implications. Firstly, it has significantly enhanced the researcher's knowledge and awareness of the profound and potentially severe problems associated with the pandemic's impact on social communication satisfaction, not just in Malaysia but globally. The study highlighted that factors like gender, contrary to initial assumptions, do play a role in social communication satisfaction during a pandemic, alongside broader social communication challenges. This newfound understanding, gleaned from both the research process and the insights of previous scholars, is invaluable for future studies. The experience of conducting in-depth research in this specific field has also refined the researcher's understanding and methodological skills, making subsequent work more reliable and valid.

For future research endeavors into this complex subject, several recommendations are offered. Researchers should be prepared to navigate high-level terminology. To improve respondent engagement and data quality, simplifying questionnaires and ensuring they are easy to understand is crucial. When respondents fully comprehend the questions, it facilitates accurate responses and enhances the validity and reliability of the study. Finally, for a more profound and nuanced understanding of social communication satisfaction, especially concerning individual experiences during a pandemic, qualitative research methods are highly recommended. Face-to-face interviews, for instance, can provide richer, more detailed insights than quantitative surveys alone, allowing researchers to explore respondents' experiences in depth and in real-time. This approach can uncover complexities and individual narratives that numerical data might miss, offering a more holistic view of the pandemic's social communication impacts.

In conclusion, this study successfully identified a significant relationship between the pandemic's impact and social communication satisfaction, affirming that the unprecedented global health crisis profoundly altered how individuals connect and derive satisfaction from their social interactions. While the study found no age-related differences in social communication satisfaction, it revealed that gender plays a role, with implications for how individuals cope with remote and mediated communication. Grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the research underscores the critical importance of fulfilling social needs for overall well-being and motivation. The findings provide valuable insights for future research and highlight the need for continued exploration into the evolving dynamics of human communication in a post-pandemic world.

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