Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Multiple Relationships

Sumi Rani Saha
Department of Sociology, University of Barisal, Barisal-8200, Bangladesh
sumiu21@gmail.com

Abstract

The study explores the impact of globalization especially mobile phone on the emergence of multiple relationships among the students of University of Dhaka. This study used Giddens' concept of disembedding to characterize globalization. Thus, in the study, globalization is conceptualized in terms of accessing mobile phone and multiple relationships are defined as forming and maintaining romantic relationships with multiple partners via mobile phone. It was hypothesized those who use multiple SIM cards are likely to maintain contact with multiple boy/girlfriends which was examined using a self-administered questionnaire from a sample survey of 360 respondents. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 25 years old. Results showed that mobile phone is a significant determinant of forming romantic relationships with multiple partners and using multiple SIM cards is significantly associated with simultaneously maintaining contact with multiple boy/girlfriends.

Keywords: Globalization, Disembedding, Multiple SIM cards, SMS, Romantic relationships, Boy/girlfriends.

Introduction

As a modern tool of communication, mobile phone is accelerating the process of globalization. It enables people to communicate with each other without time and space restrictions. Mobile phone has transformed the way of individuals love, Ellwood-Clayton[1]. Once romantic relationships are formed by face-to-face interaction or telephone, but now things have changed. They are now fashioned by mobile phone, Asia Market Intelligence Limited[2], Mori[3]. It has now become a "space of intimacy", Raiti[4].

It allows for opportunities to explore the potential of new interpersonal relationships, Oksman and Turtiainen[5], Ling[6], Tomita[7], Thompson and Cupples[8], and enlarges the number of potential communication partners, Kopomaa[9], Geser[10], and lovers, Wajcman[11] et al. It has become the "ideal tool for the management of countless loose, close or intimate relations", Ling[6]. As Prøitz[12] says, "The mobile phone dovetails well with the work of romance, allowing people to closely connect with loved ones whom they know in the flesh as well as those people whom they know as digital constructions". The mobile phone enhances youth's ability to establish romantic relationships with multiple partners at the same time. It enables youth to construct various identities with different romantic partners through the use of multiple SIM cards. Mobile phone has made it possible to sustain long distance relationships.

Hypothesis and research aims: It was predicted that those who use multiple SIM cars are likely to maintain contact with multiple boy/girlfriends. It was a research aim to explore how mobile phone helps young people to form romantic relationships with multiple partners.

Mobile phone and romance: By using disembedding theory of globalization, Yoon[13] explored that females were more likely to use mobile phones to create intimate networks than males. In Mori[3]'s study 19% of the respondents use text messaging to initiate a date. In Green and Singleton's[14] study, Asian girls used mobile phones for managing romantic and secret relationships with men. The study of Pertierra[15] explores that mobile phones are used by youth for expanding their relationship networks through sending messages to unknown numbers. Mobile phones have become a useful medium to send romantic text messages to strange numbers, Ellwood-Clayton[16], Pertierra[15], Ellwood-Clayton[1]. Humphreys and Barker[17] suggest that in conservative societies, mobile phone brings a unique opportunity for young people to explore intimate and sexual relationships before marriage. Using a mixed-methods approach, Matanhelia[18] conducted a study which explored that young people used their mobile phones to create and maintain friendships with opposite sex. They also used mobile phones for making friends via dialing random numbers with whom they have never met.

Hijazi-Omari and Ribak[19] explored that Palestinian Israeli girls got the mobile phones from their prohibited boyfriends for sustaining their romantic relationships and sometimes arranged a second SIM card to develop new romantic ties. Ganesh[20] conducted a study in Mumbai to explore how mobile phone helped Kothis, a South Asian feminine male identity, to find out multiple sexual partners. The study suggests that Kothis are likely to enlarge their networks of prospective sex partners by using mobile phone. In another study, Ganesh[21] explored that a woman working as a cabin crew in an international airline managed multiple sexual relationships through mobile phone by

constructing various identities with her partners. Ellwood-Clayton1 also revealed that having multiple SIM cards have made it possible to maintain several secret relationships at the same time.

Theoretical Framework: Anthony Giddens: globalization, time–Space distanciation and disembedding: To Giddens[22], globalization is primarily about time-space distanciation and telecommunications. As he says "the communications revolution and the spread of information technology are deeply bound up with globalizing processes. A world of instantaneous electronic communication, in which even those in the poorest regions are involved, shakes up local institutions and everyday patterns of life". In the era of globalization, new communication technologies such as mobile phone have eliminated the boundaries of time-space. Now it doesn't seem that we are far away from our intimate partners when a mobile phone is in our hand. The process of disembedding is closely connected to the time-space distanciation, Gidens[23]. It means "lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space", Giddens23. When social activity lifts out from localized context, it allows social relations across time-space distances. Our social life was dominated by "presence" or by localized activity in pre-modern societies.

Modernity separates space from place and now the "absent" others have become more important in our life', Giddens[23]. In pre-modern societies, intimate relationships exist only with those with whom we have regular face-to-face interaction, Ray[24]. In modern society, people interact more with strangers and new communication technologies generate new types of strangeness and intimacy, Ray[24]. Time-space separation and disembeddedness has made modern society more flexible and dynamic. Mobile phone has become a part of our popular culture. As a result, young people are becoming disembedded from social and traditional norms. Mobile phones brings with it a unique opportunity for youth to form and maintain premarital relationships. Premarital partnerships are strictly discouraged in Bangladesh and in spite of restrictive social norms; youths in Bangladesh are increasingly becoming engaged in romantic relationships with multiple partners via mobile phone.

Methodology

The study adopted quantitative methodology and survey is used as a data collection technique. The study site was two halls of University of Dhaka - Ruqayyah hall (female students) and Surja Sen hall (male students)-which were randomly selected. Using a random sampling technique, a total of 360 participants were selected of which 180 were males and 180 were females. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, a self-administrated questionnaire was used to obtain necessary information from the respondents.

Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), data were analyzed and Chi-square test was done.

Results and Discussion

Table-1 shows the number of boy/girlfriends currently engaging in a romantic relationship via mobile phone. Among 360 respondents, 282 (78.3%) respondents currently engage in a romantic relationship via mobile phone of which 45.7% of the respondents engage in romantic relationship with one boy/girlfriend via mobile phone. Whereas 44% of the respondents reported that they currently engage in romantic relationships with two boy/girlfriends via mobile phone. In Matanhelia18's study, one male respondent reported that in spite of having a girlfriend, he formed another one through mobile. Table 1 also shows that 6.7% of the respondents currently engage with three, 2.5% with four and 1.1% engage with five boy/girlfriends via mobile phone.

Table 2 shows the methods using for making boy/girlfriends on mobile phone.

Majority of the respondents (78.9%) used texting or SMS for making boy/girlfriends on mobile phone. A number of studies also explored that romantic relationships are formed through text messaging, Oksman and Turtiainen[5], Byrne and Findlay[25], Vasudev[26], Prøitz[12], Ellwood-Clayton[1], Mori[3]. Table-2 also shows 65.6% and 63.1% of the respondents reported that they made boy/girlfriends by calling unknown numbers and dialing random numbers on mobile phone.

Table-1
Number of boy/girlfriends currently engaging in a romantic relationship via mobile phone

Romantic relationship	Number of boy/girlfriends (%)					N
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	
Currently engaging	45.7	44.0	6.7	2.5	1.1	282

Table-2
Methods using for making boy/girlfriends on mobile phone, N=282

Methods	Making boy/girlfriends (%)
Random dialing	63.1
Using SMS or text messaging	78.9
Calling unknown numbers	65.6

To explore the assumption that those who use multiple SIM cards are likely to maintain contact with multiple boy/girlfriends, a Chi-square test was conducted. Among 360 respondents, 297 (82.5%) respondents currently have boy/girlfriends and 281 (78.1%) respondents use more than one SIM card. Table-3 shows that among those who use one SIM card, 62.9% and 37.1% of the respondents maintain contact with

one and more than one boy/girlfriend via mobile phone respectively. Among the respondents who use more than one SIM card, 41.4% of them maintain contact with one boy/girlfriend via mobile phone and 58.6% maintain contact with more than one boy/girlfriend via mobile phone. The test is significant since p=<.05 and the value of χ^2=9.894.

Table-3
Number of using SIM cards and number of boy/girlfriends maintaining contact via mobile phone

Number of boy/girlfriend	Number of using SIM card		Total
	One	**More than one**	
One	44 (62.9%)	94 (41.4%)	138 (46.5%)
More than one	26 (37.1%)	133 (58.6%)	159 (53.5%)
Total	70	227	297

χ^2=9.894; df= 1; p=.002

A similar finding is found in Ellwood-Clayton[1]'s study that showed having various SIM cards help to maintain multiple relationships concurrently. In Ganesh's[20] study, Kothis used mobile phones with dual SIM cards to find out multiple sexual partners. Hijazi-Omari and Ribak[19] also explored that palestinian Israeli girls, in spite of having a boyfriend, arranged a second SIM card to develop new romantic ties. Mobile phone and multiple relationships: People, over the ages, exposed their intimacy to others by using flowers, cards and love letters. Communications technologies, especially mobile phone have also been become the medium by which intimate relationships are initiated. In the era of mobile phone, forming, maintaining and sustaining romantic relationships with someone have become easier and quicker. Just a voice call or a text can make it happen.

All of the respondents surveyed in the study stay in dormitories. So, they are outside of parental control and enjoy more freedom than those who stay with their parents. They enjoy freedom in maintaining contact with their boy/girlfriends and free mixing with the opposite sex. In such a condition, mobile phone adds new opportunity for young people to form, manage and maintain romantic relationships with multiple partners. It enables people to explore new, unorthodox romantic relations, Scifo[28] as well as "depthless" and superficial relationships, Gergen[27]. As Malia[29] says, "mobile phone has given us wings to go discover the world without the guilt that we have left our loved ones behind.

Contrary to the common belief the communication technology has shrunk the world; it has actually expanded an individual's world. Possibilities, opportunities, new relationships, new dimensions to old relationships, all can be discovered through the device in your pocket."

Conclusion

The mobile phone has become an easy way to initiate and explore romantic relationships with multiple partners of the opposite sex. The findings of the study indicate that mobile phone is a significant determinant to the emergence of multiple relationships and that use of multiple SIM cards is significantly associated with maintaining contact with multiple partners.

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