

DOCTORAL THESIS

Testing a two-pathway model connecting mobile phone use and loneliness among Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a long tradition of research into the relationship between technology and psychological well-being, few studies examine the relationship between mobile phone use and loneliness (Chan, 2015). Far away from their home countries and living in constrained conditions, female domestic workers in particular might experience chronic loneliness, and the mobile phone is a crucial lifeline for them. Using a face-to-face survey of 492 Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, this dissertation details how different uses of mobile phones are related to different types of loneliness among this vulnerable population. By differentiating between communicative and non-communicative use of the mobile phone, and between social loneliness and emotional loneliness, the results indicate that Filipino domestic workers' non-communicative use of the mobile phone could decrease their social loneliness, while communicative use neither decreases nor increases both social and emotional loneliness. This finding supports the proposition that mobile phone use is beneficial to individuals' psychological well-being and extends the existing literature on the relationship between mobile phone use and loneliness.

Most importantly, there is still no a systematic framework to explain the underlying mechanism connecting mobile phone use and loneliness. Based on the technology paradox and the paradoxical impact of mobile phone use on loneliness, this dissertation develops a two-pathway model to illustrate the underlying mechanism. The first pathway postulates that mobile phone use has a positive influence on loneliness through preference for online communication and problematic mobile phone use, which is based upon the theoretical framework of Davis's (2001) cognitive-behavioral model, Caplan's (2003) theory of preference for online communication, and the literature on the bidirectional relationship between technology and psychological well-being. Grounded in the social convoy model (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Antonucci, 2001), the second pathway posits that mobile phone use has a negative impact on loneliness through social network availability and social support. The findings show that the two-pathway model indeed exists. In the first pathway, mobile phone use increases emotional loneliness by leading to problematic mobile phone use. In the second pathway, mobile phone use results in decreased social loneliness through increased social support or through the joint impact of social network availability and social support. This dissertation makes theoretical and practical contributions to the field of mobile phone use, not only by developing a two-pathway model to uncover the underlying mechanism connecting mobile phone use with loneliness, but also demonstrates the technology paradox and the paradoxical impact of mobile phone use on loneliness among the Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. It will be worthwhile to replicate and testify this two-pathway model in other populations, such as elders, adolescents, and young adults.

Keywords: Mobile phone use, Loneliness, Technology paradox, Two-pathway model, Filipino domestic workers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Loneliness	1
1.2. Mobile Phone Use.....	3
1.3. Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong	5
1.4. Mobile Phone Use for Female Domestic Workers	10
1.5. Main Content of the Study	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1. Mobile Phone Use and Loneliness.....	14
2.1.1 Mobile phone use: Communicative and non-communicative use.....	14
2.1.2 Loneliness: Social loneliness and emotional loneliness.....	16
2.1.3 Mobile phone use and loneliness: The technology paradox.....	20
2.1.4 Research gap and significance of the study.....	21
2.2. Mobile Phone Use, Preference for Online Communication, Problematic Mobile Phone Use, and Loneliness	25
2.2.1 Theoretical framework	25
2.2.2 Mobile phone use and preference for online communication	28
2.2.3 Preference for online communication and problematic mobile phone use	30
2.2.4 Problematic mobile phone use and loneliness.....	31
2.2.5 Mobile phone use and problematic mobile phone use	33
2.2.6 Preference for online communication and loneliness.....	34
2.3. Mobile Phone Use, Social Network, Social Support, and Loneliness	35
2.3.1 Theoretical framework: The social convoy model.....	35
2.3.2 Mobile phone use and social network	41
2.3.3 Social network and social support.....	43
2.3.4 Social support and loneliness	44

2.3.5 Mobile phone use and social support	45
2.3.6 Social network and loneliness	46
2.4. Comparison of the Two-Pathway Model	49
2.5. Sociodemographic Factors	52
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	54
3.1. Sample and Data Collection.....	54
3.1.1 Recruitment of participants	54
3.1.2 Sociodemographic characteristics of sample.....	57
3.2. Questionnaire and Measures	58
3.2.1 Loneliness.....	58
3.2.2 Mobile phone use	59
3.2.3 Preference for online communication	60
3.2.4 Problematic mobile phone use.....	60
3.2.5 Social network	61
3.2.6 Social support	62
3.2.7 Sociodemographic variables.....	63
3.3. Data Analysis Methods	63
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	69
4.1. Mobile Phone Use and Loneliness	69
4.2. Mobile Phone Use, Preference for Online Communication, Problematic Mobile Phone Use, and Loneliness	69
4.3. Mobile Phone Use, Social Network, Social Support, and Loneliness	73
4.4. Comparison of the Two-Pathway Model	80
4.5. Sociodemographic Factors	83
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	85
5.1. Mobile Phone Use and Loneliness	88
5.2. Mobile Phone Use, Preference for Online Communication, Problematic Mobile Phone Use, and Loneliness	91
5.3. Mobile Phone Use, Social Network, Social Support, and Loneliness	98
5.4. Comparison of the Two-Pathway Model	107
5.5. Sociodemographic Factors	112
5.6. Limitations	114

5.7. Conclusion.....	116
REFERENCES	120
APPENDICES	142
Appendix 1. Questionnaire.....	142
Appendix 2. Informed Consent Statement.....	145
Appendix 3. Reference Tables	147
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	166