



Across The Ocean, But Not Apart: How Fathers at Sea Can Use Technology to Strengthen Relationships with Their Children

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ABSTRACT

Seafarers are often away from their families, and the Internet could help them stay in touch off the coast. Constant communication is the key to fostering relationships, and seafarers may enhance their bonds with their kids while they are aboard through the Internet. The study aimed to determine the impact of the Internet on seafarers' relationships with their children. The five Filipino seafarers who responded using convenience sampling in the province of Iloilo had at least five years of experience on board with children. Moreover, this is qualitative research where data was gathered through narrative inquiry and analyzed using interpretive and thematic analysis. The results showed how important Internet access onboard is. Seafarers expressed that the utilization of the Internet is advantageous in resolving problems, helps show affection to their children, and helps them feel at home even if they are on board, thereby promoting family connectedness. The Internet was one of the reasons that assisted seafarers in maintaining their long-term career status. These contributing factors made it possible for seafarers to communicate through social media and virtual relationships, which helped them, feel that they were close to their families. While on board, they were able to strengthen their bond with their child or children via the Internet.

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1. Background of the Study.

With the rise of the Internet in recent decades, its impact on society has been transformative at multiple levels - including in communication, access to knowledge and social interaction (Huizer, 2017). Internet, a system architecture that has revolutionized communications and methods of commerce by allowing various computer networks around the world to interconnect. The Internet provides a capability so powerful and general that it can be used for almost any purpose that depends on information, and it is accessible by every individual who connects to one of its constituent networks. It supports human communication via social media, electronic mail (e-mail), "chat rooms", newsgroups, and audio and video transmission and allows people to work collaboratively at many different locations.

It supports access to digital information by many applications, including the World Wide Web (Dennis, 2022).

More than 80% of shipping companies now provide some level of on board Internet access to crew for welfare and operational reasons (Wingrove, 2019). Therefore, these aided the seafarer's leisure options as well as their ability to communicate with their family and friends. When it comes to the shipping industry, connectivity on board has been shown to boost seafarers' mental health and overall well-being. Because they are leaving their friends and families behind while serving on board, seafarers frequently experience emotions of isolation and loneliness as they're leaving behind their friends and families during their serving shift on board. Therefore, access to the Internet should be a basic right, as it gives seafarers the opportunity to stay in touch with their closed ones ashore, while they are in the middle of the ocean.

This study aims to assist practitioners and future seafarers know the importance of having access to the Internet while at sea, as well as how seafarers may enhance their bonds with their

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kids while they are aboard. The study is significant to maritime school students since, if they choose to work on board in the future, they will be separated from their families. They will learn strategies for strengthening their bonds and relationships with their family while they are at sea from this study. The goal of this study is to discover the impact of the Internet in strengthening the seafarer's relationship towards their children. Moreover, seafarers are frequently separated from their family for months or even a year at a time, only the Internet would allow them to communicate.

2. Statement of the Problem.

This study aims to determine the impact of Internet to seafarer's relationship in with their children. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What means of communication do Filipino seafarers employ to make themselves feel at home when on board the ship?
2. How does Filipino seafarer foster relationship with their children through the use of Internet?
3. How can the online relationship between Filipino seafarers and their children generate a sense of affective relationship?

3. Related Literature.

3.1. Impact of ICT in Sustaining Family Ties.

Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown (2008) discovered that the usage of ICT did not significantly affect people's ability to balance their professional and personal lives. Furthermore, the majority claimed that ICT enhanced their family life by enabling them to stay in touch throughout the day and plan events away from the office. They also imply that ICT may lead to more time spent with families since chores that formerly required travel time can now be completed at home thanks to technology.

In their study of 60 British families, Devitt and Roker (2009) discovered that text messages were frequently preferred by young people when speaking with their parents about challenging topics. The feeling of security that comes with ICT is valued by both children and their parents, according to the Devitt and Roker study. Because they could call for assistance via their cell phones, young people claimed that they were more eager to take on more responsibility. Likewise, parents valued the ability to keep tabs on their kids' whereabouts and activities. This tended to lessen parents' worries about the welfare of their kids.

According to the study of Wajcman, Bittman, and Brown (2008), ICT enhances family life by enabling them to stay in touch throughout the day and plan events away from the office. Text messages were frequently preferred by young people when speaking with their parents about challenging topics. Parents valued the ability to keep tabs on their kids' whereabouts and activities (Devitt & Roker, 2009). Seafarers are often away from their families, so it's important to maintain communication with them. It has been discovered that ICT can be a

catalyst to enhance family interactions (Williams and Merten, 2011; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Fraser, 2012). The study by Garinga, M., et al. (2018) revealed that Filipino seafarers use Facebook to connect with family for 1-2 hours only since most of them were trained to be away from their families due to their long years of service on board. Having access to the Internet at home makes a significant difference in the connectedness between the child and his or her migrant parent, as it allows for more frequent communication (Alampay et al., 2021). ICT and the Internet play a great role in the lives of seafarers and their families. This allowed them to connect and keep in touch with each other even if they were away from each other, which helped them strengthen their bond. ICT is the catalyst for fostering and enhancing family ties.

4. Research Design.

This research uses qualitative approach - narrative inquiry research design which provides information about the seafarers' use of the Internet in strengthening father and child relationship. Also, this study would shed light in discovering what other things that seafarers usually do in order for them to have positive relationship with their children.

5. Informants of the Study.

The informants of this study were five active seafarers on board of deck and the engine department with a sea service of at least five years. The informants must have children who is 10 years old and above. The respondents were conveniently chosen by the researchers in the Province of Iloilo. The said respondents were composed of deck and engine department. They consist of one (1) third officer, one (1) chief officer, and one (1) second officer in the deck department. They had one (1) oiler and one (1) third engineer in the engine section.

6. Research Instrument.

This study used an interview guide consisting of 10 questions that sought to answer the problem of the study subject to the validation of the experts. These are two parts of the instrument: Part one are the personal information of the respondents' name (optional), age, sex, civil status, number of children, department, rank and length of service. Part two contains questions about the seafarers' use of Internet in strengthening father and child relationship.

Interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers during the qualitative interview were used in the conduct of this study. The protocol comprises the following components: (1) Heading (date, place, interviewer, and interviewee); (2) Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedure is used from one interview to another; (3) The questions (typically an ice breaker question at the beginning followed by 4-5 questions that are often the sub-questions in a qualitative research plane, followed by some concluding statement or a question; (4) Probes for the 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail

or to elaborate on what they have said; (5) Space between the questions to record responses; and (6) A final thank you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview (Creswell, 2007). Information and data from the interviews were recorded by making handwritten notes with the respondents.

6.1. Methods / Data Gathering Procedure.

The researchers originally created a draft of questions to answer the study's goals. After the draft had been reviewed by a group of experts, the final interview / survey guide was revised for any mistakes or suggestions. Then, the questionnaire was used during the interview for data collection.

The respondents were informed of the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be used, the expected benefits to the participant and/or society, the potential of reasonably foreseeable risks, stress, and discomforts, and alternatives in participating in this research. The participants were given the chance to ask questions to help them understand the purpose of this research. The data gathered was encoded and interpreted using phenomenological analysis and thematic analysis.

7. Data Analysis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience. It produces an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions and it recognizes that this is an interpretative endeavor as humans are sense-making organisms. It is explicitly idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Thematic Analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a data set. The thematic analysis allows the researchers to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

8. Ethical Consideration.

Ethical considerations for the study included upholding principles of the human subject, getting informed consent, and weighing the benefits and risks. The consent form explained the research study, rights and protection of the informants, and the opportunity to decline to answer a specific question and to withdraw from the interview at any time. At the start of each interview, the researchers explained the purpose of the study. The informants were asked to sign the waiver of informed consent and a copy of which was given to them. They were informed that all their answers will be treated with utmost confidentiality, not to be divulged to anybody and be used solely for research purposes. They can also decide to withdraw from participation in the research at any time.

9. Results and Discussions.

9.1. Analysis of Data.

Based on the conducted interview, the informants stated that they were able to maintain and strengthen their relationship with their children through instant communication utilizing video calls and chat access to an Internet connection. They felt connected and at home due to the virtual connection, which also helped them deal with their mental health issues and home sickness. Seafarers communicate frequently, discuss issues with their kids, and find solutions via virtual communication.

Theme 1: Internet Availability is Dependent on Location and Company Policy.

All of the informants have said that there is Internet onboard available for them to use. Also, the availability of the Internet was also dependent on their location. One out of five informants said that they only have Internet onboard in Japan. They need to buy sim card and connect to the Internet to communicate with their children. They are only permitted to use the Internet during their rest or off-duty hours in order to communicate with their families. The first informant, 3/E Falip, stated, "We can only use the Internet in Japan, but in other ports, the on-board Internet is not available". The fifth informant, C/M Fred stated, "We have Internet on board. We use the Internet personally during our rest hours and off duty only".

Internet access onboard the ship is sometimes not available in certain geographical locations where the ship is based. While using the Internet onboard, it is really important that it be used properly, and the crew onboard must adhere to the guidelines and policies set by the company because this will reduce the risk of an accident that might happen.

Theme 2: Taking Advantage of Different Social Media Application (video call and chat).

All of the informants have said that they use video calls and chat to communicate with their children while they are on board. Through this set-up, they were able to connect with their children in the most convenient and easiest way possible.

It has been identified in previous study of Murray and Campbell (2015) the advantages of ICT in fostering relationship with the families. Despite they were world apart, still they can keep in touch with distant relatives, exchanged news and information, increase intimacy and affection. Communicating through various social media platform even provided them a means of leisure and relaxation, and connections to social support. C/M Fred said, "We utilize video calls or chats on the Messenger application throughout our use of the Internet. It has been extremely valuable to us because we are able to communicate with our children".

ICT is crucial for sustaining family ties, especially with distant and extended family members (Stern and Messer, 2009; Tee, Brush, and Inkpen, 2008). It is also in congruent to the study of Garinga, M., et al (2018) in which he stated that messenger is the most used feature of Facebook. Some of the respondents also use Facebook for social interaction. By using Facebook, they maintain their relationship with their families,

even if they are far from each other.

Theme 3: ICT as Catalyst in Sustaining Family Ties.

Three out of five of the informants had problems while on board relating to their children. They perceived to address the problems through open communication. They can freely communicate and talk about whatever they are going through, especially if they have to settle problems with their children. 3/E Falip said, "...problems with the children who are not disciplined, especially since I am far away. So when there is an Internet connection available on board, I call them and give them some advice to be responsible and always be good".

According to five informants, when the Internet is unavailable to communicate with their families especially when they face some challenges, they use satellite and single side band to contact them.

All of the informants agreed that the utilization of the Internet is advantageous in resolving problems relating to their children. By having a real time communication virtually, they can strengthen their relationship with their children. Whenever the informants have a vacant time or when they are on off duty, they maximize utilization of Internet to advise their children timely. Roger (Oiler) said, "Through the Internet, I could help them and know their problems, and I could also advise them and help them with their problems there in the Philippines. Also, I could give them important advice that will guide them on the right track". Furthermore, seafarers' use Facebook to cope with homesickness. The study revealed that most of the respondents connect with their families from 1-2 hours only since most of them were trained being away from their families due to their long years of service on board. Some of the respondents also use Facebook for social interaction.

Theme 4: Constant communication shows affection.

All of the informants agreed that the utilization of the Internet helps parents show affection to their children if they are onboard. They stated that with the help of the Internet, they were able to maintain constant communication with their children as it demonstrates their concern and affection. Communicating virtually help them relieve their stress from work. C/M Fred said that "...constant communication with our children is very important, especially during times that they need our advice". The overall content of communication is significantly linked with perceived openness and expression of affection between father-child relationship.

Theme 5: ICT improves family connectedness.

All of the informants have agreed that the advent of the Internet has helped them feel at home even if they are onboard. C/M Fred said, Internet is very important and very useful because during communication especially using this video call, it is like we are together. They also said that with the help of the Internet, they can monitor and stay updated on what is happening to their family. All of the informants agreed that virtual connections improved and maintained their relationships with their children. The informants find virtual communication to be very important, especially in providing a good relationship be-

tween their children; they said it feels like they are beside one another through virtual communication.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made it easier for families to stay connected regardless of their physical location. Through various technological tools such as video conferencing, social media, messaging apps, and email, family members can keep in touch with each other regularly. This means that families no longer have to rely solely on face-to-face communication, which can be challenging for those who live far away from each other. ICT also enables families to share important moments together virtually, such as attending virtual events or watching movies together online. With these tools at their disposal, families can strengthen their bonds by staying connected even when they are physically apart.

10. Discussion.

Constant communication is vital to maintaining relationships with family and fostering strong family ties. In the study, based on the data that the researchers have gathered from the respondents, practically everyone believes that the Internet plays a vital role in fostering relationships between seafarers and their loved ones. Through the advent of technology and the Internet being available on board, the informants claimed that this greatly helped them to connect with their family and solve issues that their children were facing. Furthermore, using social media and virtual communication, seafarers aided them in solving the problems within their children by giving advice, lessons, and encouragement. It is also stated that if they cannot connect with their family through the use of the Internet or social media, they cannot function during their duty. The majority of the informant's response was that the Internet helped them foster their relationship with their child or children while on board.

In the study, it was discovered that ICT and the Internet as means of communication were vital to seafarers who work internationally as a tool to strengthen their ties with their families, which corresponds to the related studies that support the researchers' claims. Furthermore, the Internet onboard is also the reason why seafarers continue their challenging tasks while they are away from their loved ones. The Internet provides communication to both individuals, which makes them feel like they are together through virtual communication applications. As soon as they go back to work on board, there is the Internet, and through the use of social media, it has filled the gap of incompleteness between seafarers and their families. From the related studies, it was stated that ICT is the catalyst in fostering and strengthening family ties, which has been a helpful tool in resolving family issues and problems.

Conclusions.

1. Filipino seafarers use social media applications like video calls, chat, etc. as means of communication with their loved ones while on board. This is in line with the assumption that the Internet fosters family and affective ties between seafarer-child relationships.

2. The Internet has become an instrument for strengthening the bond between seafarers and their children. Despite the distance between them, the family members were able to resolve family problems with the help of the Internet. Furthermore, it also improves connectedness among family members and has become a conduit for showing affection to one another. These results reinforce the assumption that the Internet fosters family and affective ties between seafarer-child relationships.
3. To be able to communicate with their children whenever needed and to be available at any time for personal conversations, even virtually, contributes to having a good relationship. In addition, the ability to show affection either through video calls or chats, resolve problems despite their absence, and the idea of being able to still fulfill the responsibility as a parent regardless of the distance could not emphasize more the importance of the Internet in nurturing a sense of affective relationship among family members. These results go along with the assumption that the Internet fosters family and affective ties between seafarer-child relationships.

Recommendations.

In light of the research findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. It is recommended for the company to ensure that there is a stable Internet connection on board the vessel. Given the importance of connectivity, it is further recommended that contingency plans or alternative means of communication be in place in case an Internet connection is not available at sea.
2. To further strengthen the relationship and communication with their children, seafarers should explore other social media platforms that are appealing to younger generations, such as TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, etc.
3. Before going on board, it is recommended that seafarers establish a strong bond with their children and family members and shower them with their full attention and affection so as to mitigate the effects of being away from them while on board. This way, should there be times of intermittent connectivity, the relationship with the family members will still be strong and will not be strained by the temporary absence of communication.
4. It is recommended that seafarers and their family members maintain open communication, and there should be proper expectations in terms of the limits of communication while on board. This way, communication problems can be avoided.
5. It is recommended for future researchers to undergo similar studies, but with a focus on other challenges that beset seafarers or on opportunities and other factors that affect their life through using of ICT on board.

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