The personalization of smartphone use by mothers from low-class family in Palembang

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Abstract

The societal impact of technological advancements is profound, leading to significant transformations in the way people live. However, a significant proportion of the population continue to be marginalized and excluded. This study aims to examine the complex dynamics that shape the adoption and integration of technology into the daily lives of mothers from low class families. It also investigates how these mothers overcome challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by smartphones to benefit their lives. This study employs a constructivist paradigm and utilizes phenomenological approaches using social construction of technology framework. The data collection was done through in-depth interviews with 10 mothers in Palembang City who met the specified requirements for informants. This study shows that the social and economic factors are the primary factors behind technology appropriation process of mothers from low-class families. They strategically manage their use of mobile technology to meet the unique and particular demands of each home. The results of this study demonstrate that technology is not merely a functional instrument; it is also an entity that is embedded with social and cultural significance, making it inextricably linked to the social dynamics and gender context

Keywords: Low-Class Family, Mothers, Smartphone, Technology Adoption

Introduction

Over the past decade, mobile technology usage has become widespread throughout all segments of society, including marginalized populations that have historically had limited access to technology. Mobile technology use has penetrated all aspects of life, including the life of mothers from marginalized groups, which in the context of this research are defined as groups with limited access to economic, social and cultural resources. Studies conducted in the global south nations have explored gender-based disparities in digital access, when limited education, career opportunities, or income hinder access to telecommunication devices (Cullen, 2001; Hilbert, 2011). Researchers have discovered that in certain circumstances, mobile phones do not alter social interactions, but rather reinforce pre-existing societal structures (Baird & Hartter, 2017). Further investigations indicate that the advantages of using telephones are significantly impacted by current social circumstances (Asaka & Smucker, 2016; Zaheer et al., 2018). Scholars contend that current methodologies for assessing the impact of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) on society in underdeveloped countries are insufficient (Duncombe & Boateng, 2009). Previous investigations have primarily concentrated on the accessibility of mobile phones in urban settings, disregarding the consequential impacts, especially in rural areas where women encounter the most vulnerability (Wang, 2017). This study seeks to investigate the influence of social structures on the way mothers from marginalized groups integrate smartphones into their daily routines.

Indonesia's current ranking as the fourth highest in terms of smartphone users globally (Newzoo, 2024) misses to fully reflect the extensive adoption of technology by its users, particularly mothers. Multiple studies undertaken in developing countries show that women continue to encounter numerous challenges in effectively utilizing basic technologies, especially smartphones (Delgado et al., 2023; Pei & Chib, 2021). These challenges often stem from various socio-economic barriers, limited digital literacy, and gender-specific constraints that impede their access to and proficient use of technology (Helsper, 2022), which is starting to occurred the appropriation process. Technology appropriation refers to the process by which humans adapt and

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incorporate technology into their life according to their specific needs and social environment. Appropriation also explains all matters relating to motivation and reasons for using technology. The subject matter is around the initial utilization of the internet and the process of familiarizing oneself with the internet and its affiliated devices. The internet becomes integrated into the household and assumes the role of a domestic object once it is brought into the house and actively utilized. The appropriation phases take place prior to the introduction of technology into private households from the market. During this stage, people become aware of the possible functionality and symbolic meaning of unknown commodities and begin to evaluate their suitability and usefulness for navigating daily life before making a final decision to purchase and adopt. In particular, they prefer to picture ICTs in relation to the household's existing technological ecosystem and sociocultural context, and plan probable physical placements, employing routines as well as solutions to tensions and conflicts that may be caused by the introduction of new technologies. Once ICT is appropriated into the household, it must be put physically in the domestic space and temporally integrated into the user's daily routine.

Feminist technology studies have shown how gender is involved in the creation, dissemination, and utilization of technology (Kleif & Faulkner, 2003; West et al., 1996), which leads to the conceptualization of gender and technology as mutually shaping (Wajcman, 2006b). In case of mothers from marginalized groups, the appropriation of mobile technology is constructed from the environment so that the appropriation process is motivated by basic communication needs, and also by the desire to overcome limitations faced in everyday life, such as access to educational, health and economic information. Through a personalization lens, this research seeks to understand how individual preferences, values, and socio-cultural context shape mobile phone use and appropriation. Personalization in this context involves how these mothers adapt technology to meet their specific needs, creating digital spaces that reflect their personal identities and values. From a sociocultural perspective, this research explores how dynamics of power, gender, and marginalization interact with technology in the context of these mothers' lives. For example, as shown by research conducted in Asia and South Africa where women are compelled to borrow smartphones from other family members in order to establish a secure communication environment, as their spouses restrict their use of smartphones (Paul & Dutta, 2023). Through narrative explanation, this study aims to reveal personal stories that highlight the resilience, innovation and adaptation strategies used by these mothers in facing their daily challenges with the help of mobile technology.

This study contributes significantly to our understanding of digitalization among marginalized populations by emphasizing subjective experiences and socio-cultural circumstances. Furthermore, it aims to offer a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between gender and technology, as well as how disadvantaged mothers utilize smartphones for addressing challenges in their everyday lives. Moreover, the results of this study are expected to provide valuable perspectives for policymakers, community development professionals, and technology innovators in creating solutions that are both inclusive and attuned to the requirements of marginalized populations.

Method

The research is based on the Constructivist Paradigm, which views reality as subjective experience and awareness. This paradigm relies on interpretation and the use of qualitative approaches to acquire knowledge (Crotty, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mason, 2002). Scholars in this paradigm aim to observe and analyze ongoing processes in order to gain a deeper understanding of individual behavior and the spiritual nature of the environment (Hidayat, 2002). The informants in this study were chosen from mothers from low-class families due to the fact that they frequently encounter various obstacles in utilizing and accessing technology, particularly smartphones. Lower socioeconomic families typically face difficulties in terms of financial resources, educational opportunities, and access to information, which could affect their adoption and utilization of technology in their everyday life. Furthermore, mothers play a crucial role in overseeing diverse elements of family life, such as children's education, health, and household finances.

This project aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how mothers from low-income backgrounds navigate and overcome the challenges they face, to achieve this goal this study employs an empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenological approach established by Clark Moustakas (1994). This psychological phenomenology is derived from Husserl's concept of phenomenology, specifically epoche, which aims to separate the experiences of the author and informants in order to gain a fresh perspective on the issue within inquiries. The objective of this research is to provide a more extensive viewpoint and concentrate on the personal encounters experienced by mothers in their everyday consumption of mobile phones, as opposed to ethnography which typically concentrates more on observing behavior and social interactions within the wider framework of a specific culture or community. The phenomenological technique enables researchers to provide detailed descriptions and thorough investigations of internal experiences, personal interpretations, and the intricate connection between mothers and technology. This aligns with the research's objective and primary focus.

The procedures carried out in this research start from identifying the phenomenon or object of human experience to be studied. The subjects in this research were ten mothers from lower economic categories who used smartphone technology in their daily lives to take care of families with school-age children in urban areas. Ten mothers from low-class family who live in Palembang City were informants for this research, which can be seen in Table 1 below:

Results and Discussion.

Smartphone Usage in Domestic Space

In the digital age, mobile technology, particularly smartphones, has become an essential communication and information tool in everyday life. This study takes a sociological perspective on technology, which demonstrates that technology is shaped by social factors (Wajcman, 2006a). Multiple societal elements exert influence over an individual's selection of technology, which then forms the technology itself, along with its in relation social implications. This means that in order to get the greatest possible benefit of technology, we have to acknowledge that it is formed by the social, political, and economic environments in which technology is employed. The utilization of smartphone by mothers within the home provides a distinct and significant viewpoint for comprehending the social and cultural interactions that occur within the household. The interplay between technology, persons, and families is contextualized within the domestic environment, which is frequently perceived as a personal and solitary domain. Moreover, mother uses technology in her daily life to accomplish her role as a mother and meet the expectations of her family and society (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2008).

The process of domestication involves the transformation of technology through a series of modifications and adaptations. Domestication highlights the household as an important and purposeful location for media-related activities. Hence, this research aims to examine the interconnected processes of exclusion and identity formation in connection to the domestic home, the surrounding environment, and the nation as a space of belonging (Morley, 2000). The findings of this study suggest that the mother makes most of the technological decisions at home, with the informant's husband typically having a lesser role in these matters. Adolescents in certain households assume the responsibility of guiding their mothers on the utilization of smartphone features, including messaging applications and social media platforms. The result of this study also shows that the way mothers engage with technology is closely tied to the family's ideology, including factors such as gender equality within the family, the extent of their contribution to the family, and their position in both the family and society, which extends beyond reproduction to include productivity (Goyal, 2011).

Social Norms as the Main Driving Force for Technological Appropriation

Appropriation, in this particular context, refers to the act of possessing or obtaining technology. During this stage, there is a process of discussing and reaching agreements that ultimately result in the acquisition of technological commodities, namely smartphones in this research (Bakardjieva, 2005; Silverstone, 1993). Smartphone ownership enables individuals to extend their reach beyond

the confines of their homes, as this acquisition takes place beyond the domestic premises (Lim, 2016). Smartphone ownership enables individuals to extend their reach beyond the confines of their homes, as this acquisition takes place beyond the domestic realm. These functions are largely intended to comply with the social and cultural expectations that exist in the everyday lives of mothers. Social norms refer to the accepted and expected patterns of behaviour that influence how others expect us to act (Hwang & Kim, 2007). This is especially obvious in the way mothers embrace smartphones, as external influences strongly influence their decision to acquire this technology. Table 2 is a summary of the reasons that mothers appropriate mobile technology.

Table 2. Motives for Appropriating Mobile Technology

Motives for Appropriating Smartphones	En	Id	El	Ta	Wi	Mi	Pu	Ma	Me	La
Contact parents and close relatives		√	√						√	
Communicate with friends	√			√	√	√		√		
Look for information about the neighborhood		√	√					√	√	√
Gaining additional income		√					√	√	√	√

Source : by Author

The table above contain lists of various reasons of smartphone motives in appropriating technology, indicated by the informants initials. A checkmark under each initial signifies the specific motive for smartphone use by that individual. The data illustrates how the informants strive to meet the social and cultural expectations encountered by mothers in order to maintain positive relationships with their family, relatives, and neighbours. This research highlights how the smartphone, as a ubiquitous device, not only possesses technological capabilities but also embodies cultural values (McDonald, 2016). The research findings demonstrate how women acquiesce to the expectations of their maternal role, according to societal norms that determine moms must constantly be present to attend to their spouses and children, while also cultivating positive interactions with the external environment. Accessing social networks beyond the confines of one's home also fosters a sense of individuality that extends beyond familial relationships (Svensson & Larsson, 2016). This is evident in research findings that demonstrate the importance of friends and neighbors in influencing decisions regarding the acquisition of mobile phones.

Among all the research participants, the social component of smartphone usage stood out prominently. The experiences of the informants in this research can be comprehended by adopting a technology domestication perspective. This perspective views media and communication technology as distinct types of technology, as they are not only physical objects situated in specific places and times, but also serve an additional function as conveyors of information (Berker et al., 2006; Couldry et al., 2007). The research informants' motivation for acquiring technology is driven by the social desire to connect with their environment, including family and friends. Mobile technology is customized based on personal preferences and seamlessly integrated into their daily routines, which are consistently influenced by the technological behaviors of those around them. This leads to mothers becoming part of groups that collaborate to create collections, establish meanings, and engage in activities that shape their individual lives (Bakardjieva, 2009). Multiple studies have shown that mobile phones with social media applications can expand a user's communication network, enhance social connections, and foster a sense of emotional intimacy with the others they interact with (Archer & Kao, 2018; Lee, 2005; Ravi, 2014). The analysis of this research data indicates that the primary factor influencing the process of acquiring smartphones is the desire to broaden and reinforce women's social networks. This allows the participants of the study to enhance their connections with friends and/or neighbors, which is essential for upholding societal norms. By carrying out the Social Construction of Technology framework (Pinch & Bijker, 1987), this study finds that the decision to adopt smartphones is not solely based on technical factors but also influenced by the social context and interactions of the users. Women's use and understanding of

smartphones in this scenario have been affected by the societal norms that require them to uphold strong social bonds. The design and functionality of smartphones are shaped by societal expectations, as they are intended to facilitate communication and social bonding. Therefore, the process of acquiring and utilizing smartphones among women in this study demonstrates broader social dynamics and the interplay between technological artefacts and social structures.

Support System in Acquisition of Mobile Technology

In the technology acquisition process, the support system for mothers plays an inseparable role in supporting the effective use and integration of technology in the dynamics of domestic life. The support system for mothers in this study included family, relatives, friends, and also neighbors who contributed significantly in providing access to resources, knowledge, technical assistance, and emotional support. Women have long been considered inferior to men, especially when it comes to the use of technology (Rahayu & Lim, 2016). This leads to women needing the existence and accessibility of an effective support system in facilitating a smoother technology acquisition process for mothers, and ultimately, the analysis underlines the critical need for establishing a comprehensive and adaptive support network, one that caters not only to the technical requirements but also to the psychosocial dimensions involved in the mothers' journey of technology adoption. Table 3 delineates the support framework that assists the research participants in the process of technology appropriation.

Table 3. Mother's Support System in Acquisition of Mobile Technology

Support System in Technology Appropriation	En	Id	El	Ta	Wi	Mi	Pu	Ma	Me	La
Husband bought first smartphone	√			√	√	√				√
Buying the smartphone with their own money		√	√				√	√	√	
Child teaching how to use a smartphone		√		√	√	√				
Self-taught in using smartphone	√						√	√	√	√

Source : by Author

The utilization of technology by the participants in this research exposes a number of patterns that offer understanding into the manner in which technology is employed within their residences. The informants, comprising ten women from low socioeconomic origins with diverse histories, possess differing experiences in the acquisition, learning, management, and utilization of technology. Regarding the acquiring procedure, the half of the informants was given technology by their spouses, who held the position of household head. This was accomplished either through direct purchase or as a gift. Nevertheless, other half of informants made a purchase of technology using their personal funds, although they still need permission from the husbands.

The informants exhibited a mixture of self-taught learning and learning from their teenager child when it came to obtaining expertise in technology. Most women relied on online resources to gain knowledge about technology usage, highlighting the importance of technical literacy in today's digital society. Mothers were the primary users and managers when it came to overseeing technology usage, while children and men exerted varying degrees of influence. According to informant, elementary school-aged children were the main users of technology, suggesting a possible trend of younger generations using technology more frequently. Nevertheless, in general, the women in the survey assumed a more prominent position in overseeing and employing technology, indicating that technology is increasingly becoming an integral part of women's everyday life. This means that mothers as users become significant and active figures in the social formation of new communication technologies and their relationship to social institutions, in this case smartphones (Bakardijeva & Smith, 2001). Mothers, therefore, do not navigate this technological landscape in isolation since they are part of a larger social context that collectively influences and shapes their technological experiences.

The data indicating that majority of informants possess the required abilities to operate smartphones aligns with prior research demonstrating that mobile phones enhance and broaden their social connections and support systems (Handapangoda & Kumara, 2013; Hossain & Samad, 2021). This enables them to master technology, thereby challenging societal prejudices that portray women as technologically inadequate and timid. Additionally, smartphones minimize women's lack of access to information and expose them to nontraditional and enjoyable environments, which are the manifestations of autonomy and power.

Management of Mobile Technology Usage

The utilization of smartphones, while providing access to new information sources and opportunities, also poses significant challenges in terms of time management, especially for mothers who juggle multiple roles in managing their families and, in many cases, participating in family economic activities. The primary focus of this subsection is how mothers from marginalized groups, often faced with various forms of resource limitations, manage to integrate mobile technology into their daily routines while ensuring that its use yields maximum benefits without compromising their domestic and familial responsibilities. As Leung (2005) posits, although women have access to technology, they still struggle to find leisure time as their leisure is more fragmented and blurred with their unpaid work at home (Wajcman, 2008), where women are perpetually seen as busy.

This study delves into how smartphones, as omnipresent tools, are leveraged to support these tasks through applications and services that facilitate time management and organization. However, the potential distractions caused by unregulated smartphone use are also acknowledged as a major challenge. Nonetheless, for the informants of this study, the primary task remains household chores, leading all informants to use their smartphones in a limited manner, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Management of Mobile Technology Usage

Management of Mobile Technology Usage	En	Id	El	Ta	Wi	Mi	Pu	Ma	Me	La
Dominated by Children	√		√							
Using smartphone for a limited duration		√		√	√	√		√		
Using smartphone only for work related activity							√		√	√
Using smartphone to schedule daily activities			√							√

Source : by Author

The research indicates that the informants actively utilize internet resources to acquire knowledge about technology, demonstrating a keen interest in adopting technology. Like previous studies by which suggests that users of technological systems carry out creative appropriations which can lead to possible changes in technology with humane goals and that users become significant and active figures in the social formation of new communication technologies and their relationship to social institutions in it runs in the family. They consistently search for information and acquire the necessary skills to use technology in a manner that holds significance for them. The prevalence of women taking charge of technology usage also underscores the significance of the social environment in which technology is utilized, where societal norms and expectations influence the manner in which technology is employed inside families. In general, the theory of domestication of technology offers a valuable framework for comprehending the integration of technology into families and the influence of societal norms and expectations on its usage.

Researchers frequently acquire the oversight of misconstruing women's relationship with technology by assuming that women have limited skills or capacities in utilizing technology. As a result, they overlook women's autonomy in using technological devices, solely based on the fact that women do not utilize technology in the same manner as males (Triastuti, 2013). Consistent with this viewpoint, this study demonstrates that gender does not inherently determine an individual's attitude towards technology. Furthermore, there is no perceptible disparity in the proficiency of

husbands and wives in utilizing diverse applications of technology. The study found that mothers had superior ability in utilizing mobile technology as they additionally tended to allocate more time to their smartphones. Nevertheless, they have a profound sense of accountability for the duties they uphold and fulfil inside the family. This has a significant impact on how mothers conduct themselves, which includes regulating their usage of mobile devices.

From the standpoint of the social construction of technology, these findings underscore the fact that the understanding and utilization of technology are shaped by society. The framework of the social construction of technology emphasizes that technology is influenced by the values, norms, and practices of individuals who use it. Mother's frequent usage of mobile technology in this situation can be seen as an affirmation to their particular social roles and obligations within the family. Their proficiency in using smartphones is not solely determined by their individual skills, but is also influenced by the societal expectations imposed on them. Mothers are motivated by these expectations to use technology in ways that assist them in fulfilling their family responsibilities, such as organizing schedules, handling home chores, and maintaining communication with family members.

Conclusion

The findings of the investigation indicated that the utilization of smartphones by mothers varied and was personalized to the unique characteristics of each individual. The use of smartphones is significantly impacted by the social and economic circumstances of where they live. This phenomenon can be seen from the initial stages of technological adoption, particularly in the motivation behind acquiring a smartphone. The main motives behind the acquisition of smartphones among mothers in this study were primarily economic and social in purpose. Specifically, they wanted to earn additional income and establish communication with their relatives. The mother's technical support system undergone changes in process, with children undertaking more technological responsibilities than the husbands. Similarly, smartphones are mostly used for household purposes, specifically for childcare and as a source of additional earnings. Hence, by applying the concept of social construction of technology, we can see that the way mothers engage with smartphones is a collaborative process in which their social surroundings, roles, and support systems together form their technological behaviors. This approach highlights that the use of technology by women is deeply embedded in the societal framework of their life, influenced by both their personal choices and the structures of society.

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