

The Dynamics of Family Communication among Working Mothers in the Digital Era

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Abstract. *In this modern age, most families have both parents working. Despite their professional responsibilities, mothers play a crucial role in the family's health and well-being, particularly as the primary educators of their children. This research aims to analyze the experiences of working mothers regarding family communication dynamics through WhatsApp, focusing on the closeness between working mothers and their children. The study employs qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach to explore the shared experiences of individuals or groups with similar characteristics. The participants are working mothers aged 27 or older, with at least a diploma education, who actively use WhatsApp to communicate with their children and reside in Bandung. The research indicates that WhatsApp is a highly effective communication tool for working mothers to sustain family communication dynamics. It helps instill positive values, sympathy, and empathy, and is considered a primary necessity for maintaining a close relationship between working mothers and their children.*

Keywords: *working mom, family communication dynamics, whatsapp media*

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INTRODUCTION

Family communication is defined as the willingness to discuss everything openly within the family, including both positive and negative aspects, and the commitment to address problems honestly, patiently, and transparently (Mega et al., 2022). The quality of family communication is crucial because effective communication among family members determines family harmony (Aswandy, 2020). All family members must contribute to warm relationships and interactions to create a harmonious family (Priliantari et al., 2017). In a family, a lack of frequent communication can lead to dysfunctional relationships between parents and children, which can negatively impact their bond.

Parents' various activities, busyness, and problems influence the limited

quantity and quality of communication between family members (Priliantari et al., 2017). In this modern age, work responsibilities are shared by both fathers and mothers. Data from the Central Statistical Agency (BPS) indicates that the labor force participation rate of women in Indonesia has increased in recent years. According to BPS, by 2021, 39.52% or approximately 51.79 million women were engaged in economic activities. This figure represents an increase of 1.09 million people compared to the previous year, which was about 50.7 million people. Additionally, Bandung is among the three major cities that significantly contribute to women's participation in the labor force in the province (Rahima & Nugraha, 2023).

Empirical data shows that many working mothers in the town of Bandung

have experienced changes in their family communication dynamics. The presence of various media technologies has transformed family communication from face-to-face interactions to fast, instant, and virtual communication (Rahayu et al., 2021). Media memory replaces the traditional memory of place and time with the family. It can store, recall, and retrieve any information (Prasanti, 2016). With today's advances in communication technology, the limitations of physical communication can be mitigated through media. In the era of computers and the Internet, social media allows people to engage in social activities and maintain their interactions through virtual media (Mega et al., 2022).

A working mother must have her own reasons or motives for pursuing a career. While my focus is not on these motives, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of a mother's role in the family, which significantly impacts the health and well-being of all family members. According to tradition and norms, a mother also serves as the primary educator of her children (Fajriyati et al., 2022). In families with working mothers, communication often occurs indirectly through media rather than face-to-face. This approach helps instill positive values, empathy, and sympathy in the family, particularly in the children, and supports the development of quality and harmonious family communication relationships.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, several methods can address the challenge of maintaining good family communication while the mother is working. These include setting a communication schedule with the family, being an active listener, being open, honest, and appreciative, and fostering effective communication (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). This approach aligns with the need for

active family communication, which depends on family elements, structures, and effective communication practices, such as discussing how to solve family problems or conflicts (Mega et al., 2022).

Data from the American Academy of Pediatrics, along with Santrock's opinion (2012), shows that quality family communication can build strong emotional bonds between family members (Mahmudah & Rusmawati, 2018). Such communication fosters strong emotional connections within the family (Rizki & Cahyono, 2021). Mother-child attachment is a relationship that develops when a child experiences security, comfort, and physical and mental closeness (Nabilah et al., 2021). This attachment also refers to the bond between parents and children that provides a sense of security, enabling the child to explore the world feeling safe and protected. An asymmetrical relationship occurs when a child receives protection from their parents (Mahmudah & Rusmawati, 2018). The mother is often seen as the safest place for a child, offering a sense of fun, safety, and protection from threats. Children tend to be very selective in choosing their attachment figures, with most viewing their mothers as the primary role model (Mahmudah & Rusmawati, 2018).

To maintain the bond between working mothers and their children, it is essential to communicate intensively through media so that the mother can continue to fulfill her role as the primary caregiver. One effective medium for this purpose is WhatsApp (WA), which offers versatile remote communication options, including text, voice, and video, without constraints of space and time. WhatsApp is also the most popular communication platform in Indonesia; according to the 2019 Digital Report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, 83 percent of internet users in Indonesia use WhatsApp (Rahman & Maududi, 2020). Beyond communication,

WhatsApp can be utilized to engage in interactions that foster human empathy (Rahman & Maududi, 2020).

Previous research titled “Kelekatan Anak Dengan Ibu di Era Digital” found that full-time working mothers can maintain close connections with their children through video calls. The development of a child’s motor, physical, mental, language, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects is influenced by their closeness to the mother. This study suggests that parents should foster relationships with their children through various means to ensure that mothers remain present in their children’s lives, addressing their psychological and sociological needs (Rahmatunnisa, 2019).

This study on the dynamics of family communication through WhatsApp media builds upon previous research, which indicates that work does not hinder effective communication with children through social media (Naufal, 2019). The findings are consistent with studies showing that WhatsApp is the most popular communication medium globally, including in Indonesia (Rahartri, 2019). Additionally, other research highlights that WhatsApp’s role extends beyond mere communication; it significantly impacts fostering empathy and facilitating social aid movements in pandemic situations (Rahman & Maududi, 2020).

This research differs from previous studies in terms of the media type used and the research context. It specifically examines the use of WhatsApp in family communication. WhatsApp has become a widely used instant messaging application that facilitates communication for individuals, including within families (Permana et al., 2023). It is the most popular social media platform in Indonesia, with 90.9% of users engaging in group communication within families (Annur, 2024). This

study explores various aspects, including WhatsApp’s role in fostering positive values, empathy, and sympathy within family communication dynamics. The findings are expected to enhance the management of family communication for working mothers, ensuring high-quality interactions. Additionally, the results may help improve corporate understanding and support for working mothers, which is crucial for maintaining close relationships with their children through technology. Such support can also enhance work motivation, indirectly boosting employee morale and productivity.

METHODS

To meet the study’s objectives, researchers involved eight informants who are working mothers, aged 27 years or older, with at least a diploma-level education, and actively using WhatsApp to communicate with their children. These informants, denoted by the symbol “I,” are based in Bandung. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, positioning researchers as key subjects due to their involvement in the research issues (Rahmatunnisa, 2019). Qualitative research methods are naturalistic, taking place in real-world contexts and focusing on a deeper understanding of phenomena, interpretation of meaning, and its complexity (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative research, the study of phenomenology, aims to explore and understand the experiences of individuals or groups with similar characteristics (Putri et al., 2023a). This study seeks to build on the experiences of working mothers regarding the role of WhatsApp media in instilling positive values, empathy, and sympathy in their children.

The data results were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s qualitative data analysis, which focuses on processing data through the stages of reduction, data display, and verification (Rahmatunnisa,

2019). Data analysis is a continuous process that requires ongoing reflection on data, asking analytical questions, and writing brief notes throughout the study. This involves the collection of open data, which focuses on general questions and the analysis of information from participants. During the reduction phase, the researcher separates the data assessed as relevant and aligns it with the research purpose. This reduction includes a transcript of the interview results attached to the research findings. In the display phase, the researcher classifies or categorizes the data according to the research objectives. This categorization includes data related to the role of WhatsApp media for working mothers and the use of such media in instilling positive values, empathy, and sympathy in their children. The display results highlight the informants' interviews, which will be presented in the research results section.

The conclusion withdrawal phase is the final step to identify data polarization. Data polarization is sorted according to several factors, such as consistently or frequently expressed statements from multiple informants and the most relevant and important statements for the research. The polarization results from this data

can be used as keywords that will serve as analytical material in the discussion of the research results (Hidayat & Hafiar, 2019).

Data collection techniques included interviews and observations. The interviews aimed to gather primary data by involving eight working mother informants. The focus of the interviews was on exploring the role of WhatsApp media for working mothers and how this media is used to instill positive values, empathy, and sympathy in their children. Observations were conducted to obtain additional data and to validate the results of the interviews. Besides primary data, the researchers utilized secondary data from various relevant literary sources, primarily previous research articles. The details of the research informants are shown in Table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study will focus on several key areas. First, the role of WhatsApp in family communication dynamics. Second, efforts to instill positive values, empathy, and sympathy between working mothers and their children. Third, the media preferences of WhatsApp for working mothers. Before discussing the dimensions of the study, the

TABLE 1. Informant Profile

Informant Initial	Age	Job	Number of Children	Child's Age
I1	36	Human Resources Staff	2	9 and 5 years old
I2	37	Chief Secretary	1	4 years old
I3	27	College Librarian	2	2 years old & 8 month
I4	55	Laborant	2	26 and 22 years old
I5	32	Logistics staff	2	12 dan 2 years old
I6	32	Koordinator Corporate Communication Oetomo Hospital	2	8 dan 5 years old
I7	36	Jackal Holidays Manager	2	12 years old dan 6 month
I8	36	College Career Development Staff	1	8 years old

Source: Research Data, 2023

researchers confirmed that the informants were working mothers who actively used WhatsApp media to communicate with family members during working hours.

Social Media Functions for Working Moms

The research results highlight that WhatsApp is a highly effective communication medium for working mothers, playing a crucial role in sustaining family communication dynamics. I1 acknowledges these observations, noting that WhatsApp facilitates maintaining family connections despite physical distance.

“This was very helpful because, in addition to text, it allows for video calls and phone calls. The advantages include its ease of use, enabling them to control over a child in real-time and directly monitor the child’s development through various features.” (Interview I1/13/11/2023).

Statement I1 aligns with the opinion of I4, who mentioned that WhatsApp is extremely helpful for communicating with children who are currently abroad.

“WA has been very useful in communicating with my children from childhood until now, even though they are already working. Despite their busy schedules, we still maintain intense communication through WhatsApp.” (Interview I4/21/11/2023).

WhatsApp also serves as a tool for reminding my family about school duties or activities at home. For example, it helps remind the children of routines or tasks they need to do. It also serves as a reminder for the assistant who helps with homework and takes care of the child. The following I7 reveals this.

“My child is cared for by a babysitter. I provide her with a phone to manage

the child’s needs, ensuring it is always charged and available so I can monitor his milk schedule, meals, and sleep times. For the older child, WhatsApp is used to remind him about lessons, assist with teaching, and manage homework. This way, I can still monitor and remind the children, either through the babysitter or directly.” (Interview I7/22/11/2023).

They help keep parents close to their children. Thus, the statement from I6 reflects the role of WhatsApp media in maintaining family harmony. The media is considered effective in managing family relationships.

We try to encourage the child to be open with their parents from a young age. I position the child as a friend. For example, my first child, whenever he comes back from school, always makes a video call or sends a voice note to share his day, including any issues with friends. It’s our duty as parents to listen. Sometimes, the children also seek solutions from me.” (Interview I6/22/11/2023).

From the statements expressed by informants I6, I2, I3, I4, I7, and I8, it is evident that WhatsApp serves as a valuable tool for reminders and supporting children’s learning and religious activities. Through WhatsApp, children can still feel their mother’s presence despite physical distance, helping to maintain a strong and supportive family dynamic. This communication medium enables working mothers to send positive messages, provide support, and offer a sense of connection, even when time spent together is limited. Additionally, the frequency of communication within the family is crucial for working mothers to stay engaged with their family members, particularly their children. This is exemplified by I5, who mentioned:

“...Communication is frequent, especially with my child in the 6th grade, who has his own phone. We communicate about 4-5 times a day. For my second child, who is cared for by his grandmother, I make video calls during my office breaks” (Interview I5, 21/11/2023).

According to the opinion of the informants, working mothers generally communicate with their family members, especially their children, three to seven times during an eight-hour workday, either directly or through caregivers and other family members. This is done to ensure that their children feel their presence, even if not physically. Research involving eight informants reveals that WhatsApp plays a crucial role in the family communication dynamics for working mothers. The key findings based on interviews with these eight informants are summarized in Table 2.

From the findings above, it is evident that WhatsApp serves a function similar to direct communication. Previous research indicates that WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that allows users to exchange photos, videos, and voice messages, and to share information and engage in discussions (Rahman & Maududi, 2020). This internet-based application has significant potential as a communication medium, facilitating easy and cost-effective communication and interaction. Research also suggests that WhatsApp is superior to other chat applications due to its user-friendly

interface. The app is lightweight, conserves battery life, and uses less internet data, making it a more convenient choice compared to other chat applications (Rahartri, 2019).

In family communication dynamics, WhatsApp plays a crucial role in maintaining communication among family members, particularly in families with working mothers (Putri et al., 2023b). Family communication is essential for shaping and developing positive values, which are important for children’s integration into the community (Kaddi et al., 2020). WhatsApp enables a mother to stay connected with her child, allowing her to fulfill both her professional and maternal responsibilities more effectively and efficiently. Additionally, WhatsApp helps maintain well-being, harmony, and solidarity within the family. By using WhatsApp, working mothers can continually remind and monitor their children, either directly or through other family members. This communication medium helps keep family dynamics active, even when family members are not physically present.

Inserting positive values, empathy, and sympathy through WhatsApp Media

The research also explores the role of WhatsApp as a communication tool for instilling positive values, empathy, and sympathy. A working mother recognizes that even while at work, she can still convey positive messages and affirmations to her children. The statement from informant I1 highlights WhatsApp’s effectiveness

TABLE 2. Functions of WhatsApp Media for Working Mothers

Number	Key Findings
1	Real-Time Communication
2	Consulting and remote communication
3	Notifications and reminders to family members
4	Maintaining family solidarity and harmony

Source: Research Results, 2023

in promoting these positive attributes.

“When communicating with my children through WhatsApp, I try to ensure good communication quality by providing positive affirmations, such as ‘You are a great kid,’ ‘Mother is proud of you,’ or ‘Mama has to go to work, okay? Don’t forget to pray for mom’” (Interview I1, 13/11/2023).

The statement from Informant I1 aligns with the opinion of Informant I2, who also gives positive affirmations to her son through WhatsApp while at work. These affirmations can be both verbal and nonverbal, including the use of emojis to express positive values to her children.

“...to instill positive values, sympathy, and empathy, I usually use emojis such as ‘embracing’ and ‘kissing.’ Additionally, when speaking in polite language, I often tell my children about my work and activities so they understand that I work for their own good. Even during brief calls, I make positive affirmations to my children with phrases like ‘love’ or ‘good boy’” (Interview I2, 13/11/2023).

Other informants noted that WhatsApp is frequently used as a medium for providing motivation, such as encouraging learning or simply listening to children’s stories throughout the school day. Informant I6 mentioned that sometimes they position themselves as a friend to listen to their children’s stories.

“Children are accustomed to being open with their parents from a young age. I try to position myself as a friend. Alhamdulillah, for my first child, for example, he shares his activities with us or informs us about any problems with schoolmates through video calls or voice notes” (Interview I6, 22/11/2023).

From the above statement, it

is evident that WhatsApp is used to cultivate positive values, fostering a sense of empathy and sympathy between the child and the mother. This aligns with the opinions of informants 7 and 8, who mentioned that they regularly remind and monitor their children’s activities through WhatsApp. For young children, they use the video call feature to provide positive affirmations and greet their child, allowing them to see and hear their mother. The video call feature in virtual communication enables the child to visually connect with their mother, which is crucial for maintaining a close relationship.

“Because my daughter is a teenager, I prefer to make video calls. I usually say things like, ‘What are my good kids up to?’ I often use the term ‘good kids’ to give positive affirmations and offer prayers for them as well” (Interview I3, 11/2023).

For school-age and adult informants, communication generally includes sending love emojis, embraces, or stickers to show affection for their children. Based on interviews with eight informants, we can summarize key findings related to WhatsApp as a tool for embedding positive values in Table 3.

Based on the findings, working mothers can assume responsibility for caring for their children by emphasizing the quality of love through communication via WhatsApp. Positive communication plays a pivotal role in nurturing mutual affection between parents and children. Consistent with prior research, using WhatsApp as a communication tool with parents intelligently fosters positive interactions within the family (Zulfaya, 2020). To cultivate positive values, empathy, and sympathy in children, consider providing affirmations during WhatsApp exchanges. These affirmations can subtly infuse positive

TABLE 3. WhatsApp Media Planting Positive Values, Empathy, and Sympathy

Number	Key Findings
1	Messages of motivation and positive affirmation
2	Share positive experiences
3	Expressing family values
4	Encourage positive discussions
5	Appreciate and arouse empathy by giving appreciation
6	Using a positive emoji or sticker

Source: Research Results, 2023

energy into a child’s emotional well-being. Notably, communication carries an inherent energy—ranging from low to high. While low-energy messages often relate to negative emotions, high-energy messages possess a potent force that resonates with positive emotions (Zulfaya, 2020). Encouraging the use of positive language across various aspects of life requires a commitment to framing sentences positively—a habit that, when nurtured over time, contributes to effective communication. Just as religious values persist, family values can also be reinforced through digital media. WhatsApp now plays a role in addressing societal challenges, including family dynamics between parents and children, by promoting family values.

Symbols in communication, such as emojis and stickers, are considered important by some informants when interacting with school-age children and adults. Emojis like “love” and “embracing” are expressions of a mother’s affection for her child. The “love” emoji, in particular, is frequently used to convey love and attention. It not only provides positive sentiment but also strengthens the emotional bond between mother and child. Interestingly, the “heart” emoji sometimes acts as a substitute for words, especially when conveying complex emotions. For instance, a child sharing good news or a mother expressing pride in her child’s achievements might use this symbol. Additionally, the “heart”

emoji can effectively convey emotional states. Whether feeling happy, inspired, or grateful, both mothers and children can use this symbol to express their inner feelings (Storch & Ortiz Juarez-Paz, 2019). To build a strong bond between parents and children, understanding each other’s thoughts and feelings is crucial. Influential factors in positive communication, supported by the use of emoji symbols, help create a closer relationship between parents and children (Aull, 2019).

Providing a space for discussion, valuing what the child has to say, and offering positive reinforcement through WhatsApp media lay the groundwork for fostering an ideal and harmonious relationship. Consequently, enhancing the quality of information delivery through positive communication skills is crucial in parenting. The consensus among informants is that these positive affirmations serve as the cornerstone for strengthening the emotional bond between parents and children.

WhatsApp Media Preferences for Working Mothers

The next finding in this study is WhatsApp’s media preference for working mothers. All informants generally agree that WhatsApp has become a primary necessity for communicating with their children, as expressed by I8.

“I need WhatsApp because it helps

me communicate with my children during working hours. Additionally, WhatsApp is practical and fast, offers many features, and is cost-effective for family communication.” (Interview I8/26/11/2023)

The statement from I8 is further supported by I6, who also noted that WhatsApp is very helpful for working mothers. It is an easy-to-use communication tool and is cost-effective.

“Oh, WhatsApp is very helpful to me because, without it, I might be confused about what media to use for communication. I use WhatsApp every day because I can see my children and communicate in real time. It is flexible, allowing me to hear their voices and see their activities, so it’s truly very helpful.” (Interview I6/22/11/2023).

Both informants’ statements are reinforced by I1 and I3, who also emphasize WhatsApp’s importance as a tool for connecting and strengthening the bond between mother and child.

“WhatsApp is very helpful in staying close to my children, especially amidst a busy work schedule. While it may not replace physical presence, this social media platform allows me to stay connected through text messages, voice calls, and even video calls. It helps maintain an emotional bond and attachment with my children.” (Interview I1/13/11/2023).

WhatsApp’s media preferences for working mothers are shown in Table 4.

The substantive findings show that WhatsApp offers several advantages for working mothers, allowing them to communicate with family members or babysitters quickly and efficiently. WhatsApp provides real-time notifications for incoming messages, enabling quick responses and instantaneous interactions. This helps users stay connected and informed effectively. Previous research supports the effectiveness of WhatsApp, highlighting its ability to facilitate rapid information exchange and reach a broad audience, thereby shaping opinions and perceptions. Additionally, WhatsApp’s intuitive interface and ease of use make it a popular choice for daily communication (Colom, 2022).

Additionally, WhatsApp provides flexibility in communication, allowing users to choose between text, voice, or video calls according to their needs and circumstances. With high accessibility, users can stay connected anywhere and anytime. WhatsApp can be accessed through various platforms, such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, enabling communication as long as there is an internet connection. This aligns with previous research that highlights WhatsApp’s flexibility in various aspects of communication, allowing users to choose the format that best suits their needs and preferences. With support for a wide range of message formats and multi-platform access, WhatsApp is an effective tool for bridging communication in various situations and contexts (Aull, 2019). It allows users to engage in family affairs or work without being limited

TABLE 4. WhatsApp Media Preferences for Working Mothers

Number	Key Findings
1	Quick and efficient communication
2	Flexibility in communication
3	Maintain attachment
4	High accessibility

Source: Research Results, 2023

by location. The presence of WhatsApp helps maintain closeness between mother and child, even when they cannot meet physically for extended periods.

Interviews with eight informants revealed a consensus that WhatsApp provides convenience and aids mothers in communicating with their children. WhatsApp enables working mothers to communicate without being restricted by specific times, allowing text, voice, or video messages to be sent and received anytime. This app plays a significant role in maintaining closeness between a working mother and her child. Full-time working mothers can use video calls to communicate and interact with their children at home, compensating for their physical absence and ensuring the child still feels their presence. Video calls through WhatsApp facilitate virtual face-to-face interactions, which help sustain emotional attachment. Additionally, working mothers can send messages or short stories to their children, fostering bonds through everyday communication and allowing them to stay involved in their children's lives even when apart. WhatsApp also allows mothers to communicate with their children directly or through guardians, teachers, and other family members to stay informed about their children's development, education, and well-being (Yulianti et al., 2022).

WhatsApp serves as a platform for providing emotional support between mother and child. Through short messages, mothers can offer words of encouragement, motivation, and affection. Despite being a digital communication platform, the wise use of WhatsApp can help maintain emotional bonds and cohesion between mother and child. Similar research in broader contexts shows that WhatsApp can significantly impact relationships by fostering empathy and support between coaches and their football teams. For example, coaches use

WhatsApp to send supportive messages and motivation to their football teams, shaping team spirit (Yudhistira, 2021). Regardless of the formality of WhatsApp groups, team members and coaches often send messages beyond matches and exercises, such as congratulations on marriages, childbirth, engagements, condolences, and humorous anecdotes, fostering closer relationships (Yudhistira, 2021). This aligns with previous research indicating that video calls allow mothers to provide cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social stimulation (Rahmatunnisa, 2019). Other studies confirm that children feel their mother's presence more through video calls than text or voice messages, enhancing the child's attachment to the mother, which is crucial for meeting psychosocial and physical needs (Terras & Ramsay, 2016). Overall, WhatsApp plays a positive role in promoting interpersonal communication, especially between working mothers and their children, as well as in broader contexts.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research highlights the changes in family communication resulting from the increased participation of women in economic activities, particularly working mothers. The findings indicate that technology, such as social media and messaging applications like WhatsApp, plays a crucial role in family communication dynamics by enabling real-time interactions that substitute for face-to-face communication. This technology helps working mothers maintain their roles as educators and caregivers by transmitting positive values and preserving emotional bonds with their children through text, voice, and video. The practicality of WhatsApp allows mothers to stay involved in their children's lives despite physical distance, facilitating the exchange of essential daily

information.

This research excels due to the suitability of its method for informants with diverse educational and occupational backgrounds, representing the perspectives of working mothers in Bandung. It provides a comprehensive overview of child communication through WhatsApp, spanning from early childhood to adulthood. However, a limitation of this study is the need for a more in-depth exploration of attachment indicators, which presents a promising area for further examination in future research.

This research is expected to contribute to managing family communication for working mothers, strengthening the quality of communication, and increasing the understanding and support from employers. This support is essential in maintaining close relationships with children, even when involving technology. The findings provide insights into the importance of adapting family communication in response to changing work structures, the use of media in family dynamics, the role of mothers as educators, the significance of attachment, the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a communication medium, and the need for corporate support for working mothers.

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