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Investigating the relationship between the quality of use of virtual space and family's emotional atmosphere considering the mediating role of marital boundaries

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ABSTRACT:
The present study aims to investigate the relationship between the quality of using virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere. This study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of method. It is also quantitative research in terms of the nature of the research data. The statistical population of the study includes all 2000 married employees of Defense Industries Company in 2022. A sample size of 120 people was obtained from the statistical population to estimate the sample size using the formula of Tabachnik and Fidel (2007). However, 130 people were considered to ensure the results. The data collected tools included the emotional atmosphere questionnaire by Safuraei, Taghian, and Mahdizadeh (2014), and the quality of use of the virtual space questionnaire by Taghian and Safuraei (2016). To analyze the study data, Pearson's correlation coefficient, hierarchical regression by Baron and Kenny method, and SPSS22 software were used. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between the quality of use of virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere.

Keywords: Virtual space, Emotional atmosphere, Family

INTRODUCTION:

Family is the first environment where children take their first steps toward growth. Emotional relationship with parents is formed in this environment (Rezaei, Akbari, Ahmadian, and Yarahamdi, 2021, p. 2). The family's emotional atmosphere causes a strong interaction between parents and children and significantly contributes to the mutual understanding and acceptance between them. It also affects the quality of family interactions in the ways of examining and interpreting the surrounding environment by its members (Zarbakhsh, Hosseini Ahangari, and Mahmoudi, 2021, p. 39). The family is one of the vital elements of transmitting healthy habits that improve the lives of its members (Melguizo-Ibáñez, Viciana-Garófano, Zurita-Ortega, Ubago-Jiménez & González-Valero, 2021, p. 6). Family members have a set of duties, roles, and expectations toward each other that direct the family's movement toward its desired goals (Sexton, 2017, p. 2).

Healthy and desirable family relationships make family members adapt to themselves and their surroundings, while unhealthy family relationships provide opposite outcomes (Shafaghdoost and Shahamat Deh Sorkheh, 2019, p. 33). Thus, the emotional atmosphere, the quality of the communication patterns, and the basic values in the family have a significant and lasting impact on the formation of the personality bases and psycho-behavioral characteristics of the members (Moein, Hejazi, Morovati and Owruji, 2020, p. 15). Higher affection, trust, and security in the family will lead to better social competence of its members (Avadi Ghooshe Gonbadi and Nazer, 2020, p. 1).

The emotional atmosphere, the quality of the communication pattern, and the basic values in the family have significant and lasting impacts on the formation of the personality bases and psycho-behavioral characteristics of the members. The family's emotional atmosphere is the sum of the relationships and emotional interactions that exist between the members of a family such as the expression of feelings and interests, and the way people communicate and treat each other (Firoozi, Hosseinnejad and Zarastvand, 2022, p. 58). Family therapists argue that the best criterion and standard based on which the ethical, social, and psychological quality of people can be evaluated is the communication network of family members and the set of rules governing the environment and family's emotional atmosphere (Nikdel, Bakhtiarpour, Naderi, and Ehtshamzadeh, 2020, p. 214). Family members as a group have complex interactions with each other that are affected by the general family environment (Rawat

& Gulati, 2019, p. 16), so most of the problematic people belong to damaged families and children of families experiencing more conflicts and are exposed to maladaptive behaviors due to the lack of mental peace, lack of concentration, and confusion (Gill, Koleilat & Whaley, 2018, p. 1147). Nowadays, the quality of use of virtual space and the artificial services provided to its users has significantly affected people's family relationships. Instead of communicating with each other, which leads to the strengthening of emotional bonds between family members, they focus on communication in virtual space. This kind of relationship has no emotional burden and weakens family ties (Amin, Haroon Rashidi, and Kazemian Moghadam, 2022, p. 134). Family's emotional atmosphere vaccinates the members against Internet addiction and risky behaviors (Li, Li, Jia, Li, Wang & Li, 2018, p. 290). Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between the quality of use of virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere. It also seeks to answer this primary question does the relationship between the quality of use of virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere play a mediating role?

METHODS

This study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of method. It is also quantitative research in terms of the nature of the research data. The statistical population of the study includes all 2000 married employees of Defense Industries Company in 2022. A sample size of 120 people was obtained from the statistical population to estimate the sample size using the formula of Tabachnik and Fidel (2007). However, 130 people were considered to ensure the results. The subjects were selected by convenience sampling method and data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires. The inclusion criteria included at least six months of common life and no history of psychological interventions in the past year. The exclusion criteria included refusing to continue cooperation and incomplete filling out of the questionnaires.

Research tools
Family's emotional atmosphere questionnaire

The family's emotional atmosphere questionnaire was developed in 2022 by Safuraei, Taghian, and Mahdizadeh to measure different dimensions of emotional atmosphere in families. This questionnaire contains 33 items measuring the three components of verbal emotional atmosphere (16 items), extra-verbal emotional atmosphere (10 items), and general communication atmosphere (7 items). The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by the opinions of professors and experts. The option very low is scored 1, the option low is scored 2, the option high is scored 3, and the option very high is scored 4. Thus, the highest value is 64 for the verbal emotional atmosphere component, 40 for the extra-verbal emotional atmosphere, and 28 for the general communication atmosphere. Items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21 are scored in reverse. The reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha was obtained at 0.87 for the verbal emotional atmosphere component, 0.86 for the extra-verbal emotional atmosphere component, 0.88 for the general communication atmosphere component, and 0.95 for the entire questionnaire.

The quality of use of the virtual space questionnaire
This was developed by Taghian and Saforaei in 2020 to measure the behaviors of virtual space users that cause damage to the family system structure. It included 13 questions, 10 of which measure the quality of use of virtual space. One question measures the rate of using virtual space, one question measures the virtual networks, and one question measures the purpose of users to use virtual space. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by the opinions of the professors. The option "never" is scored 1, the option "sometimes is scored 2, the option "often" is scored 3, and the option "always" is scored 4. The questions 5 and 6 are scored in reverse. Its reliability using Cronbach's alpha was obtained at 0.75.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of research variables
In this section, the descriptive statistics of the study variables are presented.
Table 1- Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variable	Factors	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional atmosphere	Verbal emotional atmosphere	2.45	72.7	48.-0	46.-0
	Extra-verbal emotional atmosphere	1.30	88.5	50.-0	59.-0
	General communication atmosphere	7.20	36.4	47.-7	50.-0
	Family's emotional atmosphere	0.96	14.17	45.-0	77.-0
The quality of use of virtual space		2.18	02.5	53.1	78.1

The table above presents the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of the study variables and the subscales of each variable. Since the skewness and kurtosis of the study variables are between -2 and +2, it can be stated that the distribution of the variables is symmetrical and close to the normal distribution.

Correlation between the family's emotional atmosphere and the quality of use of virtual space
Correlation between the family's emotional atmosphere and the quality of use of virtual space
Table 2- Correlation coefficient between family emotional atmosphere and the quality of use of virtual space

	1	2	3	4
The quality of use of virtual space	1			
Verbal emotional atmosphere	465**.-0	1		
Extra-verbal emotional atmosphere	376**.-0	848**.0	1	
General communication atmosphere	394**.-0	898**.0	850**.0	1
Family's emotional atmosphere	438**.-0	969**.0	941**.0	950**.0

$0.01 < P^{**}$

There is a significant negative correlation between the variable of the quality of use of virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere. Since high scores in the variable of quality of use of virtual space mean not using the virtual space correctly, it can be stated that people who use virtual space inappropriately get low scores in the variable of family's emotional atmosphere. In contrast, people who use this space appropriately get higher scores in the variable of family's emotional atmosphere. The variable of the quality of use of virtual space is significantly and negatively correlated with all the components of the family's emotional atmosphere. In explaining these results, it can be stated that a new generation of life in virtual space was formed with the advent of virtual social networks and interpersonal relationships differed from their traditional form. Nowadays, virtual social networks are one of the most popular media.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis: There is a relationship between the quality of use of virtual space and the family's emotional atmosphere.

Interactive features and paving the way for creating social relationships are one of the reasons for the popularity of social networks. It has become the first five priorities of Internet users thanks to the features it provides to users. In other words, people mostly talked to each other verbally and shared their feelings and emotions face-to-face with their loved ones before the emergence of virtual space and the promotion of smart smartphones. However, relationships between people are limited to written messages, audio, and short videos with the expansion of virtual space and the promotion of social networks, making people unable to convey the meaning of their speech correctly like face-to-face communication to their audience. This causes many problems in relationships between people at the level of family, friends, relatives, etc.

Nowadays, the virtual space has penetrated the lives of many families and has had many impacts on the relationships between family members. The family is one of the primary components and one of the vital institutions of every society. It can meet the emotional, material, and spiritual needs of man. Given the significance of virtual space and its role in different dimensions of life, the Internet is a vast and growing stream that is accessible to computer communication networks in the modern world. The extensive application of the Internet in the world has facilitated communication through the computer channel. The advantages of all information and communication technologies from the past are summarized in the characteristics of the Internet. The Internet changes the way people communicate with others.

Internet with several different methods such as e-mail, instant messenger, online chat, electronic announcements, blogs, and social networks such as Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Line has found its way to establish strong communication. This interpersonal interactive function allows people to go online and communicate with others, especially at high speed and relatively low cost considering time and distance. Thus, the Internet is now becoming a part of daily life not only in advanced societies but also in most social groups in most parts of the world. The results of this study are in line with those of studies conducted by Mahdizadeh (2019), Boor, Beliad and Jian Bagheri (2020), Zandi Payam, Davoudi and Mehrabizadeh (2019), Tabarsaei, Bagherzadeh, Bazgir, and Tabarsai (2017), Shivam, Chavdhari, Chavdhari and Saldanha (2021), Yang, Kim, and Van Dijk (2021), Karter and Akdemir (2019), Ozgar (2019), and Kwan and Liang (2017).

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