Co-present smartphone use:

An ethnographic study of the contribution of smartphone use during conversations

MA Thesis

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Preface

Before you lies the master thesis 'Co-present smartphone use: An ethnographic study of the contribution of smartphone use during conversations'. This thesis examines whether and how smartphone use might contribute to conversational experiences. I wrote this thesis fulfilling the graduation requirements of the Master Online Culture program at Tilburg University's School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. I collected data for the study from April to June 2020. This period was unique because it coincided with the global spread of the COVID-19 virus, particularly in The Netherlands, which was where this study was conducted.

I had planned to conduct ethnographic observations in three separate settings. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, however, the social distancing restrictions implied that I could only research one setting. Moreover, as a result of the crisis, the degree of co-present smartphone use that I observed may differ from normal situations. I acknowledge this issue in the methodology section of this thesis and reflect on the implications in the discussion section.

I would like to thank my supervisor, M.P. Vanden Abeele for guiding me through the writing process to help me create the best academic paper I had in me. You are the best supervisor I could have wished for. I would also like to thank my lovely parents and dearest boyfriend. Your enthusiasm and well-intentioned advice helped me to remain confident and motivated.

I hope you will enjoy reading this thesis.

Nadine Visser

Breda, 6 July 2020

Abstract

Several researchers have examined the negative effects of smartphone use during conversations. Research regarding the possible positive effects of smartphone use during conversations, however, is scarce. Hence, this study aimed to answer to the question: 'To what extent and under which conditions does smartphone use positively contribute to a conversation?' To answer this question, I conducted an ethnographic study within a family. By conducting interviews and participant observations I discovered that smartphone use can positively contribute to a conversation in various ways. First, smartphones are frequently used as an 'extended mind': Family members use their phone to look up information, as a measurement tool, or as a fact-checking tool during conversations. Second, people use their smartphones during conversations to express emotions and to help others visualize a story. Finally, I observed that the participants in my study displayed hypocrisy towards smartphone use during conversations: Although they mentioned that smartphone use during conversations is not acceptable, they were all observed to be guilty of this behaviour. Concluding, the findings of this study indicate that smartphone use can contribute to conversations, although this positive contribution depends on the context: it needs to be 'appropriate' for using one's smartphone, and the group of interaction partners need to mutually trust each other to use their smartphone as a way of self-expression. However, given that I was able to study only one context due to the constraints that were created by the COVID-19 outbreak, further research should be conducted to validate these findings in different contexts and situations.

Keywords: smartphones, conversations, intimacy, relationships

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1. Introduction

Smartphones are used in many contexts, including social contexts (Malinen & Ojala, 2012). Researchers refer to this use of smartphones in social contexts with the term 'phubbing'. Phubbing is defined as 'using one's phone during a co-present social interaction' (Vanden Abeele et al., 2019, pp. 35). The term is a combination of the words 'snubbing' and 'phone'. A phubber is 'a person who starts snubbing someone in a social situation by paying attention to his/her smartphone', and a phubbee is 'a person who is ignored by his/her companion(s) in a social situation because his/her companion(s) uses or checks their smartphones instead' (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016, pp. 10).

Various researchers have studied the negative effects of phubbing behaviour. Researchers have found that phubbing behaviour negatively affects conversational experiences. For example, Dwyer, Kushlev, and Dunn (2018) found that smartphone use among university students undermined the enjoyment of face-to-face interactions: Participants reported that they experienced more distraction during face-to-face interactions and less enjoyment during interactions when they were using their smartphones than when they were not using them. Similarly, in an observation study, Vanden Abeele et al. (2019) found that participants experienced lower conversational intimacy when their conversational partner had phubbed during a conversation.

Because of its negative effects on conversational experiences, relationship satisfaction and feelings of personal wellbeing can be affected by phubbing behaviour. Roberts and David (2016), for instance, found that phubbing can negatively affect communication between partners. Similarly, Wang et al. (2017) found that phubbing committed by romantic partners resulted in decreased relationship satisfaction between married Chinese adults.

Additionally, Przybylski and Weinstein (2012) found that the presence of a phone during a conversation causes lower perceived empathy between interaction partners. Similarly, Ugur

and Koc (2015) found that, 'even the presence of phones annoy[ed] many students' (pp. 1028). In summary, researchers have discovered that different negative effects of phubbing include decreased relationship quality, distraction, and annoyance.

The above examples illustrate that the extant body of scholarship on phubbing has thus far mainly focused on the negative aspects of using a smartphone during interpersonal interactions. However, there are also reasons to assume that such co-present smartphone use might contribute to social interactions. Although scholarship regarding the positive relationship of smartphone use on the quality of face-to-face interactions is scarce, some studies suggest that certain forms of smartphone use during interactions may benefit the development of intimacy. According to Reis and Shaver (1988), intimacy is an 'interpersonal process that involves communication of personal feelings and information to another person who responds warmly and sympathetically' (pp. 375). Vanden Abeele et al. (2019), for instance, state that 'disclosing content on your phone may be conceived of as an act of self-disclosure, which contributes to perceived conversation intimacy' (pp. 37). To date, however, researchers know very little about any positive experiences that smartphone use during a conversation might create besides facilitating intimacy between conversation partners. Therefore, this study examines *to what extent and under which conditions smartphone use positively contributes to a conversation*.

Given that current literature emphasizes only the negative aspects of smartphone use during interactions, this study contributes to science by exploring if there should be developed a more nuanced view on the practice of co-present smartphone use. The examination of positive phubbing experiences will benefit future research because it invites researchers to consider different views regarding this subject matter. Because the term phubbing holds a negative connotation, I will use the term 'co-present smartphone use' from now on. This term better fits to this study and its aims.

2. Theoretical framework

To date, researchers have found that co-present smartphone use causes several negative effects. To understand why these negative effects occur, I will explore their underlying mechanisms in the following theoretical framework. Armed with this information, I will examine whether these mechanisms are, per definition, always activated and whether some forms of co-present smartphone use might contribute to a conversational experience. Therefore, I will discuss both the factors that determine whether a conversation is 'successful' and the conditions under which smartphone use might contribute to the intimacy between conversational partners. Whether smartphone use might also contribute to a conversation should concern anyone who is affected by technological innovation in social interactions.

2.1 Mechanisms explaining the negative effects of co-present smartphone use

First, I will discuss research that explores the negative effects of co-present smartphone use. Researchers have highlighted, for instance, that co-present smartphone use distracts people and undermines their enjoyment of face-to-face interactions (Dwyer et al., 2018). Some people also report that they experience lower conversational intimacy when their partner uses a smartphone during a conversation (Vanden Abeele et al., 2019). Furthermore, researchers found that co-present smartphone use causes lower perceived empathy and annoyance between conversational partners (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Ugur & Koc, 2015). Smartphone use during conversations further negatively affects communication in romantic relationships and relationship satisfaction particularly (Roberts & David, 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

Based on these studies, two underlying mechanisms that can explain the negative effects of co-present smartphone use emerge, specifically expectancy violation and social rejection.

2.2 Expectancy violation

Expectancy violation is the core of expectancy violation theory, which was first conceptualized by Burgoon in 1978. This theory states that individuals have expectations of the other's behaviour during an interpersonal interaction. Miller-Ott and Kelly (2015) explain that these expectations are 'expected behaviours based on the communicator, the relationship and the context in which the interaction occurs' (pp. 254). For example, when a customer interacts with a waiter (relationship) in a restaurant (context), the customer expects certain behaviours from the waiter, such as politeness and attentiveness.

The expectancy violation theory focuses on how discrepancy between the interaction partners' expected behaviour and their actual behaviour affects a situation. Following this, an expectancy violation occurs when the interaction partner behaves unexpectedly. This violation may be positive or negative. If the actual situation results in a better outcome than expected, a positive expectancy violation occurs. For instance, to return to the previous example, a positive expectancy violation takes place if the waiter compliments a customer on their clothing and the customer appreciates that behaviour. For the negative expectancy violation the situation is worse than expected, such as when the waiter is rude and scolds the customer. People 'place positive or negative value on any violation of an expectancy to try to make sense of it' (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015, pp. 255). The interaction partner's expectancies influence their impression of the violating partner, which can have positive or negative effects on the relationship.

Expectancy violation theory can then aid in explaining the annoyance that participants experienced during conversations in which the partner uses their smartphone, as reported by Ugar and Koc (2015). The participants did not expect their conversational partners to use their smartphones during the conversation. When their partners did use the devices, their expectancies were negatively violated.

Whether one considers an expectancy to be positive or negative relates to the way they perceive norms as individuals recognize whether others behave in a normative or deviant way and respond differently accordingly (Burgoon, 1978).

Normative behaviour

Co-present smartphone use is not always seen as deviant behaviour. Miller-Ott and Kelly (2015) found that partners who had been dating for a significant amount of time 'appeared to take it for granted that cell phones are present in all contexts' (pp. 261-262). In other words, the participants considered using smartphones during conversations acceptable. Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2016) emphasize in their study that co-present smartphone use has become a normalized habit and consider this behaviour to be socially acceptable because people frequently experience others using smartphones. Vanden Abeele et al. (2019) claim that '[using one's smartphone] during a social interaction appears contagious' (pp. 36). When someone uses their smartphone during an interaction, the other involved person might also use their smartphone, and this behaviour becomes more normative.

Whereas not addressed in previous studies, recent studies like these expose how co-present smartphone use is experienced. To fully understand the value placed on co-present smartphone use by individuals, one must pay attention to conversations and the social rules that guide them.

Conversational norms

Every successful conversation depends on the interaction partners' adherence to different conversational norms. In dialogue, the goal is to achieve a shared understanding (Franco, 2006), which requires considerations to create a positive conversational experience. These considerations are often not verbally expressed before starting a conversation. These unwritten

rules that apply during conversations are considered conversational norms because they are part

of the social norms that govern interactions. Social norms are namely defined as standards for

behaviour that are generally unwritten (Mandel, 2014). To achieve a positive conversational

experience, people need to take the conversational norms into account. The three main

considerations involved with these conversational norms (Bunt, 1999) can aid in explaining the

reasoning behind the negative expectancy violations caused by co-present smartphone use.

Similarly, the considerations can explain why such violations might not occur (or might even be

positive).

Consideration 1: management of social obligations

The first consideration introduced by Bunt (1999) as essential for creating a positive

conversational experience, is the management of social obligations. This consideration refers to

the conversational partners' expression of empathy to each other. During dialogue, each partner

needs to take the other's mental goals, possibilities, and limitations into account (Bunt, 1999).

One can expect their interaction partner to demonstrate their attentiveness through eye-contact or

an empathic reaction. Miller and Berg (1984) share this belief and refer to this ability as

'relational responsiveness' (as cited by Derlega et al. 2001). Indeed, a social interaction is

characterized by empathy for everyone involved. Consequently, when someone solely uses their

smartphone for their personal needs and has no empathy for their partner, their behaviour

conflicts with the conversational norms. This then causes an expectancy violation.

However, the fact remains that using a smartphone during a conversation is acceptable—

especially if one takes the other's needs into account. Additionally, norms are context-related

and may, therefore, differ depending on whether the situation is formal or informal (Miller-Ott &

Kelly, 2015). For example, whereas it is not considered appropriate to use a smartphone during a

date, it is socially accepted to use it during a party.

Consideration 2: management of interaction

A second conversational norm, the management of interaction, ensures the interactivity of the conversation. The conversation experience of participants observing this norm can be positively influenced. To manage the interaction, partners must consider acts such as turn-taking, perpetual and mental contact, and dialogue structuring (Bunt, 1999).

Some researchers assume that smartphone use can hamper the interactivity of the conversation by impacting the partners' ability to devote their full attention to one another (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015). For example, a conversation might end due to a silence caused by co-present smartphone use by one of the participants. However, someone might use their smartphone during an interaction but lets the other participant speak without interruption and carefully take their turn to speak afterwards. Then, smartphone use might not affect the interaction negatively because the involved people manage the interactivity of the conversation.

Consideration 3: feedback

Finally, feedback is an important factor in making the conversation interactive and successful as without it its interactivity will decrease. When a conversational partner uses a smartphone during a conversation and offers feedback to the other person, they manage conversational interactivity. For example, they might verbally confirm or repeat the others' words or use nonverbal cues such as a confirming nod. Such an exchange of words or expressions invites both partners to further interact with one another.

In summary, noticing and adapting norms during conversations might positively affect the experience associated with a conversation. A conversational experience depends on each partner's expectations of the conversation. Co-present smartphone use is becoming increasingly acceptable for conversation partners. This study must validate whether interacting individuals

experience co-present smartphone use as normative behaviour and in what contexts this

behaviour is deemed acceptable. This consideration leads me to the first research question:

RQ1: Is co-present smartphone use regarded as normative or deviant behaviour, in what

contexts do these perceptions apply, and can these differing perceptions help in explaining why

smartphone use may sometimes be harmful and sometimes not?

2.3 Social rejection

Social rejection is another mechanism that scholars often adopt to explain the negative

effects of co-present smartphone use. People have a strong need to belong (Baumeister & Leary,

1995). They are fearful of being socially rejected as this causes strong negative feelings such as

loneliness and anxiety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, it is evident that social rejection

is a feeling that people do not want to experience. However, receiving social approval and

believing that one is an attractive group member has a positive impact on one's self-esteem

(Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007). The need to belong relates to the amount of intimacy achieved

during a conversation. When someone responds with empathy to the other's story, the person

telling the story feels accepted and the intimacy between the two may strengthen. It is thus

possible to improve a conversational experience through intimacy. Now, I will examine the

concept of intimacy and the ways in which it can improve a conversational experience.

Afterwards, I will discuss how people may support intimacy through smartphone use during a

conversation and how it can positively affect conversations.

Intimacy

Intimacy is important during an interaction because it may ensure a positive experience.

According to Reis and Shaver (1988), intimacy is an 'interpersonal process that involves the

communication of personal feelings and information to another person who responds warmly and

sympathetically' (pp. 375). Essentially, intimacy is a two-sided process: it depends on both

persons involved. Therefore, to receive validation from the conversational partner is important in

creating intimacy and avoiding any form of social rejection. Intimacy in social interactions builds

and maintains relationships, which results in a positive influence on the well-being of the persons

involved (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2014; Becchetti et al., 2011).

To explain how people can manage intimacy during an interaction, Reis and Shaver

(1988) argue that three elements need to be present in an interaction: (1) self-disclosure, (2)

nonverbal communication, and (3) a certain degree of exchange and interdependence. Below I

theoretically explore whether co-present smartphone use might positively affect these elements.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal cues constitute one of the components that contribute to intimacy. Expressing

emotions or intensifying experienced emotions during an interaction can contribute to intimacy

(Reis & Shaver, 1988). For example, one can intensify their sadness through the nonverbal cue

of crying. As nonverbal cues are often not present when using one's smartphone during

conversation, someone can feel socially rejected by the other's co-present smartphone use. One

partner may feel like they do not belong because they receive limited attention from the partner

using their smartphone. As Hales et al. (2018) state, using one's smartphone requires breaking

eye-contact during a conversation, which likely reduces the conversational partner's feelings of

socially connection.

Although smartphone use may reduce nonverbal cues and make others in conversation

feel ignored, users can still employ nonverbal cues to make their conversational partners feel

comfortable and accepted. Nonverbal communication was also observed during a study in public

spaces, where the partner using their phone responded to a question with a nod (Humphreys,

2005). In short, smartphone users appear to make attempts to reduce potentially ostracizing

effects created by their smartphone use via their nonverbal behaviours.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is another component that might contribute to intimacy and refers to a

'deliberate or voluntary activity whereby people reveal information, thoughts, and feelings about

themselves to at least one other person during an interaction' (Derlega et al., 2001, pp. 153).

Self-disclosure 'fosters liking, caring, and trust, thereby facilitating the deepening of close

relationships' (Reis & Shaver, 1988, pp. 372). Verbally sharing personal feelings and

experiences can produce intimacy between two persons. This form of disclosure can act as an

invitation to validate and care for the other's inner self (Reis & Shaver, 1988). By receiving

understanding from the other, the person disclosing information will experience a sense of worth.

Additionally, disclosing personal information invites the person receiving the information

to disclose information about themselves too. Greene et al. (2006) argue that this process of

'mutual self-disclosure' contributes to people's knowledge about one another and the

development of relationships. This idea resembles what Laurenceau et al. (1998) found in their

study: partner responsiveness mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and intimacy (as

cited by Greene et al., 2006).

The smartphone can help one conversational partner invite the other partner to share

personal feelings and experiences. Vanden Abeele et al. (2019) observe that co-present

smartphone use can be an act of self-disclosure and insist that it contributes to intimacy. For

example, when someone shares a personal conversation they had with someone via a digital

messaging application, they can also share thoughts and emotions about the conversation to seek

validation and acceptance from the other person involved in the conversation. Receiving

validation and acceptance ensures caring for this person's inner self and brings the two

conversational partners closer together. Additionally, displaying media or messages on one's

smartphone to a conversational partner might contribute to intimacy because that content can

facilitate the discussion of experiences and emotions. These examples demonstrate that

disclosing information about oneself by using a smartphone during a conversation does not

necessarily equate to any form of social rejection or exclusion.

Exchange and interdependence

The third component in the intimacy process is the exchange and interdependence

between partners. Satisfying relationships characterize a balance between participant

contributions and outcomes. Partners involved in an interaction can 'increase or decrease the

intimacy of a given interaction [by regulating] their responsiveness to each other's expressed or

inferred needs' (Reis & Shaver, 1988, pp. 374). In other words, researchers believe that intimacy

depends on how partners respond to each other's needs. The responsiveness to other's needs

avoids socially rejecting the other.

One way in which conversational partners can respond to each other's needs naturally is

to use smartphones to share and exchange content and information during the interaction. As

Harvey and Omarzu (1997) note, 'the reciprocal conveyance of respect, acceptance and

attribution of constructive intentions and motivations must go hand in hand with acts of sharing'

(pp. 228). Although people tend to view smartphones as personal devices, they can be used to

exchange content such as photos and share information to make joint decisions (Lucero et al.,

2013; Carrascal & Church 2015).

Another example of using a smartphone to exchange information and attend to a

conversational partner's needs is the sharing and discussing of memes. Although memes are

widely visible online, they can also be a starting point for discussion offline. Varis and

Blommaert (2015) emphasize that sharing memes is an act of phatic communication, meaning

the act of sharing is the most important aspect of the activity. Sharing memes in an offline

conversation can ensure the conviviality of a relationship because phatic engagement in an

interaction can decrease social rejection and increase intimacy in relationships (Varis &

Blommaert, 2015). Additionally, Katz and Shifman (2017) argue that memes are personal

because their readers reproduce their meanings. Exchanging and responding to memes is thus a

way for conversational partners to disclose information about their personal interests and

personalities.

Similarly, one could say that co-present smartphone use might facilitate joint attention in

some situations. Joint attention is defined as two or more people displaying shared attention; for

instance, both conversational partners might focus their attention on one smartphone. This

activity makes someone feel socially accepted and fulfils their need to belong. As Eklund (2015)

puts it, 'joint action promotes affinity and helps build closeness and is connected to a desire for

valuable, social leisure' (pp. 534). Engaging together in a game forces the interaction partners to

depend on each other. As joint attention fulfils the need to belong, this activity helps each partner

to avoid feelings of social rejection.

Although exchange contributes to intimacy, there might also be other ways to facilitate

intimacy during conversations. I will determine how people in real life use their smartphones to

facilitate intimacy, which leads me to my final research question:

RQ2: In what ways can smartphone use facilitate intimacy during a conversation?

To conclude, I have discussed the mechanisms that explain why smartphone use can be

harmful to social relationships in the framework of expectancy violation and social rejection. I

have stated that these two mechanisms may not be negative. Considering conversational norms

and ensuring that the other feels accepted will reduce the negative effects of smartphone use

during conversations. Effects of co-present smartphone use also depend on the context of the

interaction: which norms apply in a situation. Considering these aspects may strengthen the level

of intimacy during a conversation given that they maintain a relationship between conversational

partners.

3. Methodology

The research method used for this study was social ethnography. Social ethnography is a qualitative research method that focuses on understanding people's social interactions. Ethnography is defined as 'the qualitative method of observing, talking to and interacting with people in their natural environments; that is, where they live, play and/or work' (Brennen, 2017, pp. 167). Participant observation plays a central role in utilizing this method because it shows how participants behave in their natural setting. Participant observation helps the researcher to understand every aspect of a specific group, culture, or institution (Brennen, 2017). With this method, a 'deeper understanding of a culture is gained by observing how people construct social meaning and actions in everyday life' (Matthews & Ross 2010, pp. 135). However, the fact that this understanding is an interpretation of the researcher's must be considered during analysis.

Ethnographic research triangulates different data sources to strengthen the gathering of knowledge. For this study, these data sources included informal and formal interviews, and field notes that were made during the observations. Because of the coronavirus crisis, only one context was studied. Due to limited time and resources, I selected participants that were easy to access, which caused me to compile a convenience sample (Matthews & Ross, 2010). As I was included in every sample, my interpretations could be biases, which is important to consider while analysing the data.

3.1 Participants and context

The context researched consisted of a family. The other two contexts I had planned to study were work and social environments; however, due to the restrictions that were put in place, it was not easy for me to access these environments for this study.

The interactions that were observed for this study took place inside one house; the participants included me and my two parents. Occasionally, others would join, such as my

boyfriend, my brother and his girlfriend. All were given pseudonyms (see Table 1). The

interactions were generally observed during dinner and the time before dinner when the

participants would consume some drinks and snacks together.

The participants were first asked for informed consent. If they did not want to participate

in the study, I did not observe the interactions that they were involved in. However, no one

declined to participate. In the informed consent form, the study's duration was mentioned

because of the private sphere in which the study took place. The data gathering began on April

17th and ended on May 27th. The research period ended when no new insights were gathered. The

study was approved by the ethical review board at Tilburg University.

Table 1

Participants' pseudonyms, ages, and roles

Pseudonym	Age	Role
Ben	58	Parent
Isabelle	56	Parent
John	24	Boyfriend
Luuk	26	Brother
Eva	26	Brother's girlfriend

3.2 Method used

Social ethnography includes engagement in participatory observation, where the

researcher becomes involved in conversations and activities to better understand the participants'

behaviours within a local cultural context. For this study, observing the participants resulted in

an understanding of how people act in family interactions that include co-present smartphone

use. During the observations, I focused on the participant's behaviour and reactions towards co-present smartphone use. By using sensitizing concepts (Appendix I) during observations, I engaged in all observations with the same focus. Sensitizing concepts are concepts or ideas that guide examinations (Blumer, 1954). My observations clarified how the phenomenon of co-present smartphone use unfolds in real life. The observations were overt; participants knew that I was observing them, which important for ethical reasons. I also participated in the observations because I was part of the group in which the interactions took place.

The participants were observed during activities such as dinner, watching TV together, and having drinks/snacks together (in Dutch, this activity is known as "borrel"). All these activities took place inside one house or the house's garden. Most of the time, three participants were involved in these activities. However, other participants occasionally visited the house and joined these three participants. Six participants (including me) were observed in total.

I created field notes about my observations during the first couple of weeks in a notebook, and later digitally on a smartphone. I decided to switch to digital notes because the participants noticed my notebook and explicitly mentioned that they were paying attention to their behaviour because of its presence. Ironically, they were more accustomed to other persons being on their smartphones and therefore were less distracted by digital notetaking.

The field notes followed a structure; they included a sketch of the environment or the situation, the date and time, the location, and descriptions and behaviours of the participants (Appendix III). These aspects were written down during each observation. By creating my notes in this manner, I ensured that details were preserved and that the entire event was not lost to memory (Mulhall, 2002).

Additionally, I occasionally recorded the dialogues using my smartphone. These recordings served to help me examine whether the content of the conversation influenced the level of smartphone use. I also highlighted noticeable utterances in my field notes. I converted

the written field notes into digital documents right after each observation to ensure that they were

not lost. I also deleted the audio files after transcription to ensure the participants' privacy and

security were safeguarded.

Another part of social ethnographic research is conducting formal and informal

interviews. In total, I formally interviewed each participant twice (Appendix III). Through the

formal interviews, I gained more knowledge about the participant's beliefs and thoughts

regarding co-present smartphone use, as well as about conversations and intimacy. The

interviews were semi-structured, which allowed me to ask additional questions besides the ones

stated in the interview guides. I used the interview guides to ensure that I asked each participant

the same questions (Appendix II). By using the active interview strategy, I was able to trigger

discussions between myself and the participants. This strategy helped me to look for

contradictions and challenge the participants' points of view (Aagaard, 2019). Before starting the

interviews, I obtained the consent via the signatures of each participant on a written informed

consent form.

The first formal interview included questions about the participants' thoughts regarding

smartphone use in general and during interactions in particular. This interview lasted around ten

minutes. The second formal interview included questions about intimacy, relationships, and the

exchange of information via their smartphones during conversations. This interview lasted about

fifteen minutes.

I conducted informal interviews during and after observations. These interviews were

informal because they were part of the observations. Participants were not asked to prepare for

the interviews; additionally, these interviews were not always one-on-one. The interviews were

recorded on my smartphone. After finishing an interview, I transcribed the interview as soon as

possible and then deleted the audio.

3.3 Analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis to identify and interpret key ideas and themes. During the interviews and observations, I considered sensitizing concepts, which helped me to keep the aim of the study in mind. These concepts acted as a general guide for focusing on themes and key concepts that were relevant to my analysis. After I transcribed each interview, I noted important concepts that arose. In the same way, I transcribed and interpreted the dialogues that occurred during the observations. Field notes added more context to the concepts and were used to discover how the participants were thinking about the key concepts. This was an iterative process because reading through the transcripts helped me familiarize myself with the data, which led me to the discovery of new concepts and the development of richer insights. Eventually, this process resulted in three different themes, which I will discuss with the results.

4. Results

4.1 The smartphone as an extended mind

The first theme that I discovered during the analysis of the data relates to using smartphones during conversations to gather information the mind could not know or remember. When used in this way, smartphones act as an extended mind. The concept of the extended mind, which was first introduced by Clark and Chalmers in 1998, purports that human cognition is exclusively contained to the human mind. Researchers argue that the mind can be extended outside one's head with the use of artefacts, such as a calculator (Clark & Chalmers, 1988; Heersmink, 2015). A calculator can be used to enhance the accuracy of a certain calculation that would otherwise be completed in one's mind. During my fieldwork, I encountered various examples of people enhancing their cognitive abilities with their smartphone. By using their smartphones as extended minds, the participants did not have to remember information themselves.

The participants pointed out that the most common reason for using a smartphone during a conversation is to look up information online. The goals of using a smartphone in this way were to either (1) fact-check information, (2) to clarify something, or (3) to keep the conversation going. These goals were thus mainly functional in nature.

The first reason that the participants provided for looking up information during a conversation was to fact-check information. The activity of fact-checking was observed, for example, during a discussion about the name of a local snack bar. During this discussion, the participants had forgotten the name of the snack bar. Consequently, Ben looked up the name by using his smartphone:

Ben: *Should I check how that snack bar is called? And if it's open?*
[Ben grabs his smartphone and looks up the name of the snack bar]

Nadine: *Don't you know how it is called?*

Isabelle*: I thought it was just called 'de Frituur'*

Nadine: *'Frituur Christ'*

Ben: *We are going to look it up nearby... Cafetaria.*

Nadine: *But is it a Chinese one?*

Ben: *Yes, it is owned by a Chinese... this is it.*

Isabelle: *'De Frituur', right? What's it called?*

Ben: *' 't Frituur'*

As can be inferred from the dialogue transcript, the participants exhibited some hesitation about the name of the snack bar. To make this hesitation disappear, Ben looked the name up. After Ben had looked up the name of the snack bar, the conversation continued.

Several participants explained that getting facts straight was important to them. As Luuk explained in an interview*, "When we are talking about something that has happened, an email or... that you have seen a TV series. In that case, you sometimes look it up to see how it exactly was. Then you have a fact-check."* When he was asked why he found fact-checking important during a conversation, Ben answered: *"I believe that conversations that include information are interesting. I am very focused on information. That is why I believe that the contribution of smartphones to information is important."* Although fact-checking seems rather ordinary, it is an activity that employs augmented cognition, which is a form of communication where technology is used to expand existing knowledge or to make up for a lack of knowledge (Pinner, 2019, pp. 3-4). A person might engage in augmented cognition during a conversation to look something up, to win or lose an argument, or to simply maintain a conversation.

Another reason that someone might look up information on a smartphone during a conversation is to clarify certain issues. An example of this case was observed during a conversation where John performed an online search using his smartphone to determine whether any football matches were going on after Ben asked for this information. Ben did not explicitly

ask for someone to look it up but this activity was the quickest and easiest way to obtain

clarification on the question asked.

> Ben: *Is there any German football this weekend?*
> Luuk: *That one was cancelled, right?*
> Ben: *There is.*
> John: *Last week, it was.*
> [John shares the results and additional information about some football matches using his smartphone]
> John: *Oh, they are still playing... already done with playing. Dortmund-Bayern. München in half an hour. (...) has lost against Leverkusen.*
> Ben: *Doesn't ring a bell.*
> John: *Dortmund has won.*

Clarifying certain issues allows conversational partners to add information that can advance the conversation. Without any instruction from Ben, John looked up the information by himself to help him. This exchange also exemplifies distributed cognition, which is defined as cognitive processes being distributed across the members of a social group (Hollan, Hutchins & Kirsh, 2000).

The third reason for looking up information during a conversation is to keep the conversation going. Sometimes, a conversation about a certain subject comes to an end, and one conversational partner wants to keep it going to avoid a (sometimes awkward) silence. Consequently, this conversational partner might introduce a new topic or add information to the topic currently being discussed to revitalize the conversation. Keeping the conversation going is one way for conversational partners to manage their interactions, which Bunt (1999) mentions as

an important consideration. By adding new information to a conversation, one is making sure

that there is an interaction between the conversational partners.

The introduction of a new subject was observed during a conversation where Ben first

used his smartphone to play a video that was sent by a friend; afterwards, he looked up a chart of

the COVID-19 casualties as a means of introducing a new topic into the conversation. This chart

had been looked up first by Ben and was then shared during the conversation with Isabelle, John,

and me to start a new discussion:

Nadine: *It's like a Feliz Navidad kind of song.*

Isabelle: *It is, eh…*

John: *That is Michael Jackson, right?*

Nadine: *It is a woman.*

Isabelle: *Make the world a better place, with a whole…*

John: *Earth song or something like that.*

Ben: *It is, eh... how is it called… world aid... world aid…*

…

Ben: *Let's check the Corona numbers... 94, that's nothing... deaths…*

Isabelle [laughs]: *94 is nothing...*

Nadine: *94 deaths.*

Ben: *Yes, that is almost the lowest... look.*

[Ben shares his smartphone screen with Isabelle.]

John: *Lots of hospitals are also reporting it after the weekend.*

Ben: *Yes, but you have to compare it with the other numbers.*

John: *Yes, with other Sundays.*

This interaction was also mentioned in an interview by John: *"You could also use your*

smartphone to keep the conversation going a little bit. When it really is small talk, you can show

a nice video or a good chart or, I don't know, a football result."

These examples of using a smartphone as an extended mind during conversations demonstrate that smartphones could make a conversation easier and more interactive. There are two other ways to use a smartphone as an extended mind: it can function as a measurement tool or can be used to trigger transactive memory.

The smartphone as a measurement tool

Cognitive abilities can also be enhanced with the use of measurement tools that are designed to augment one's mind or body. For example, instead of remembering someone's phone number, you could use a notebook to write it down. Using such external artefacts to enhance one's cognitive abilities means that 'cognitive tasks are performed faster, with less error, or made possible in the first place' (Heersmink, 2015, pp. 19). Today, a widely used artefact is the smartphone because they are designed to enhance people's cognitive abilities through their features and apps that serve different purposes.

I noticed that three of the participants used a smartphone as a measurement tool to extend the mind during an observation. They were playing a game and were using a smartphone as a stopwatch. The game involved guessing the amount of time remaining based on a sandglass that was visible in the room. One participant, John, kept track of the stopwatch time to see which participant was closest to guessing the correct time. During this interaction, the smartphone enhanced the cognitive abilities of the participants by keeping the time for them. The participants did not have to count the time themselves, and the accuracy of the measurement was guaranteed:

Luuk: *Did you already measure sometime how long this lasts, the sandglass?*
John: *No, do you want to know?*
[John grabs his smartphone and opens a stopwatch application]
Nadine: *One minute, I think.*
John: *We can turn it around.*

Luuk: *Guess! I think five minutes.*

John: *Do you? I think... one and a half minutes.*

Luuk: *Nadine?*

Nadine: *Two.*

Luuk: *It can never be five minutes.*

Nadine: *Why not?*

John: *Yes, turn it around.*

Luuk: *I think one.*

John: *Turn it around.*

Luuk: *3...2...1...*

John: *Yes.*

[John starts the stopwatch app on his smartphone]

Luuk: *Shit, I had to choose something different.*

Nadine: *Very fast? Much slower.*

John: *Much slower. Did you both guess one minute?*

The smartphone as a contribution to transactive memory

Another example of a way in which a smartphone can be used as an extended mind is when it is used to contribute to the transactive memory within a group. Heersmink (2015) defines transactive memory as 'a cognitive system shared by people in close relationships' (pp. 22). Tummolini and Tollefsen (2006) add that transactive memory arises in a group when its members are engaged in a common goal. To complete this common goal, the group uses transactive memory for 'encoding, storing, and retrieving information' (Heersmink, 2015, pp. 22). Since this system is shared by people in close relationships, I also came across examples during observations within of the family group.

One example of how a smartphone can trigger transactive memory is the following conversation that occurred between two participants. The conversation regarded a dinner they once had in a restaurant. During this conversation, they did not remember what they had as their

main dish. The common goal was to determine what this main dish was. In other words, they had

to retrieve information. Isabelle had earlier taken a picture of the menu and looked it up while the

conversation focused on memorizing the dishes. The conversation occurred in the following

manner:

> Isabelle: *I don't remember what it was anymore, the main dish.*
> Ben: *No, but we have kept that booklet.*
> Isabelle: *Yes.*
> Luuk: *What?*
> Ben: *What we had as a dish.*
> Nadine: *I thought it was fish.*
> Ben: *Something like flat iron steak?*
> Isabelle: *I took a picture of it.*
> [Isabelle reads the menu from her smartphone]
> Isabelle: *We had burned mackerel, pork belly, (...)… corn chicken was the main dish.*
> Ben: *Right, that pork belly was prepared sous-vide and you had to place it in almost-boiling water for ten minutes. Afterwards, you had to reheat it and take it out of the bag.*
> Eva: *Oh, right.*
> Isabelle: *That was tasty.*

The way Ben immediately remembered the dinner after Isabelle has read the menu from

her smartphone is noteworthy. Hollingshead (1998) explains that to participate with others in an

information search may be an effective strategy to retrieve information for the simple reason that

'each member's recollections of an event may trigger the retrieval of other aspects of that event

by other members' (pp. 661). In this way, participants of a group use their group mind to extend

each individual mind. A group mind may take the form of cognitive interdependence focused on

memory processes (Weick & Roberts, 1993). When Isabelle gave Ben information about the

menu, Ben was able to recall the menu. The use of a smartphone allowed the participants to retrieve information together and to reflect on that moment in time collectively.

To conclude, these different ways of using a smartphone during a conversation as an extended mind are quite common. The use of a smartphone during these activities contributed to the conversation rather than subtracted from it.

4.2 What people say versus what they do

A second theme that emerged while I was analysing the data relates to the hypocrisy that I noted concerning smartphone use during conversations. Although the participants stated that smartphone use during conversations is negative, they all still used their smartphones during the observed conversations. To find an explanation for this behaviour, I will examine the difference between what the participants said and how they behaved.

What they say

During the interviews, all the participants told me that they believe it is wrong to use a smartphone during a conversation. Eva was clear about her perspective: *"You are not really using your smartphone during conversations, that is antisocial."* One of the participants pointed out that a person needs to act socially during a conversation with others. John agreed with this perspective and added that it is better to use your smartphone when you are on your own. He explained, *"I just think it is important, especially when I am with others, that I don't use my smartphone too often. For the reason that you can also just use your smartphone in bed, or you can play a game when you are alone. Then no one is bothered by it. When you are with others, I think it is good to lay down your smartphone occasionally, just keeping it in your pocket."* Additionally, Ben noted that using a smartphone during a conversation can make a person seem like they are not paying attention anymore. He said, *"When you are really in conversation and*

someone is on his smartphone, I think that's... I think… It fits a little with… it seems like you

don't have attention anymore." He also mentioned that using a smartphone during a real

conversation is inappropriate. Isabelle also mentioned that the conversation itself could

determine whether the behaviour is inappropriate. Isabelle said, *"Imagine that you are having a*

very important conversation to you, and someone else thinks that something else is more

important, then you don't feel taken seriously." The participants were aware of the importance of

a conversation's context for using one's smartphone. This is in line with what Miller-Ott and

Kelly (2015) mentioned: that there is a difference in norms for formal and informal situations.

How they act

Although the participants said that they did not think it was polite to use a smartphone

during a conversation, they frequently used their smartphones during conversations that were

observed. During the consumption of drinks and snacks and watching television, all the

participants used their smartphones several times. For example, Ben used his smartphone during

an observed conversation about healthcare without making any contribution to the conversation:

Nadine: *But if you have cheaper healthcare, it is probably also less good, right? I would
say.*
[Ben grabs his smartphone and holds it near his ears to listen to it]
Isabelle: *When you have to pay less. There were several times that we were in France on
a holiday and that we… you got a strep throat or something like that and then you got
eh… really strong medicines.*
Nadine: *Strong is not immediately bad.*
Isabelle: *No.*
[Ben lays his smartphone down]
Isabelle: *These meatballs are spicy.*

When confronted with the discrepancy between their beliefs and their behaviours, most confirmed that their actions did not align with their views. Nonetheless, Ben mentioned that he believes that smartphone use during conversations is inappropriate, even when he does it himself: *"No, I just think it is not okay in an absolute sense. I think it is also not okay doing it myself."*

Explanations for the discrepancy between belief and behaviour

The observed behavioural contradiction between what people say and what they do can be explained through the third-person effect hypothesis, which was first developed by Davidson in 1983. This hypothesis predicts that 'individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to a persuasive communication will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves' (pp. 3). This can also be applied to using smartphones during conversations. Using smartphones during conversations is viewed as negative behaviour, and many people believe that others commit this social error more often than they do. Although the participants believe that others do it more, the fact that they *all* think this way, demonstrates that people tend to attribute routine negative behaviours to others more often than they do to themselves.

Most of the participants believe that smartphone use violates conversational norms. However, it seems that they also think that confirming that smartphone use during conversation is not right or socially desirable. John mentioned in an interview that he believes that refraining from using one's smartphone during interactions is normal: *"I think it has become the norm, that you don't use it too often when you are with others."*

While asking about their ideal conversation, the participants referenced different conversational norms such as holding fellow conversational participant's attention, being polite, and not being distracted. When the participants were asked about the effects of co-present

smartphone use, they stated that norms were being violated. Isabelle named distraction and lack of attention as negative effects of co-present smartphone use: *"When you are distracted by your smartphone and think that is more important and then interrupting the conversation. Em, or when you are not mentally present because you are doing something totally different."* Ben also discussed lack of attention as a negative effect caused by co-present smartphone use: *"It gives the impression that people are not listening or don't have any interest or think something is more important."* Additionally, Luuk identified distraction and attention loss as negative effects caused by co-present smartphone use: *"When smartphone use is not contributing to the conversation, then it is obviously just distraction. This can be noticed when someone is looking at their smartphone, then they actually don't have attention for the conversation."*

My observations demonstrate that people clearly understand when it is acceptable to use a smartphone and when it is not. Co-present smartphone use was viewed as a greater social violation when it occurred during dinner than when it occurred while a family is watching television. During dinner, there was no smartphone use observed. This finding resembles Gui and Gerosa's finding (2019): they observed that smartphones are used less frequently during dinner than during other interactions, such as hanging out with friends or watching TV or movies. This behaviour may stem from the fact that dinner is considered a more intimate activity than other activities. This family considered refraining from smartphone use at the dinner table to be an unwritten rule. Other families and social groups may have similar context constraints which 'set boundaries on the social and physical contexts in which technology can be used' (Hiniker, Schoenebeck & Kientz, 2016, pp. 1377). These constraints exist because families have expectations regarding technology use in certain contexts. In other words, the participants believe that smartphone use during conversations contradicts social rules in certain contexts and are therefore aware that this behaviour is unacceptable.

However, this behaviour was still present during observed interactions, perhaps because co-present smartphone use has become a habit for them. This potential habit was mentioned by Luuk during an interview: *"I think that it is just a habit."* Similarly, Ben explained that he used his smartphone during conversations because *"… it is a form of habituation."* Since the habit of checking notifications on one's smartphone comprises a large part of smartphone use, many people feel comfortable using their smartphones during conversations for this reason (Oulasvirta et al., 2012). Although checking one's smartphone can include checking social media or mail, checking habits also include extensive fact-checking and looking for information that is observed.

4.3 Self-expression

Using a smartphone during a conversation to express one's self was found to be a third theme that appeared during this study. Self-expression was made possible through the exchange of media and information. The participants used their smartphones to exchange information with others during conversations. They mainly exchanged facts, photos, and videos. The exchanging of facts is related to the extended mind, as mentioned before. The participants shared photos and videos to help others visualize stories and to express emotions.

Making a story visual

The participants shared photos or videos to make a story clearer by adding visuals to it. During one observational period, the conversation was focused on Luuk's cat, and a smartphone was introduced when the conversation's focus changed to a photo Luuk had sent to me. This interaction exemplifies a form of digital storytelling, namely the story-driven sharing of photos (Balabanovic, Chu & Wolff, 2000). After the story began, both participants talked about the photo and pointed out details while viewing it.

Nadine: *It was a sweet picture you sent me.*

Luuk: *Oh, that one from close [up].*

Nadine: *He has also grey hairs or something like that.*

Isabelle: *He also has white hairs, right? A moustache.*

Luuk: *Yes, also white... You mean this?*

[Luuk shows the photo of his cat to Nadine]

Nadine: *On his face. Yes, near his eyes, he has spots and then it is a little bit grey.*

Luuk: *What do you mean?*

Nadine: *Here, these spots. This is a little grey.*

[Nadine points towards the photo on Luuk's smartphone]

Luuk: *That is just some sleep in his eyes.*

Nadine: *Is that from the lighting?*

Luuk: *He always has sleep in his eyes here.*

[Luuk point towards the photo]

Nadine: *He also has some kind of spot.*

Luuk: *What he has here?*

[Luuk points towards the photo]

Nadine: *Yes.*

Luuk: *Yes, that is really sleep in his eyes.*

Expressing emotions

During one of the interviews, Isabelle used the act of sharing an image of a painting as an example of expressing why one would want a painting. She said, *"For example, when I tell someone that I found a very beautiful sculpture or a painting that I would like to have and then I could show it [to them]. Then, the other will immediately have a picture of what it exactly looks like."* Visualizing a story using a smartphone is also a way of expressing one's emotions because it allows a person to share their feelings; photographs are often used 'to share stories about experiences, travels, friends and family' (Balabanovic, Chu, & Wolff, 2000). As Ben explained

in an interview, *"When you are showing photos or videos, then these are basically images that express your emotions, your feelings."*

Two participants mentioned that they showed each other memes on their smartphones during a conversation. To answer whether he had exchanged information using his smartphone during conversations, John responded, *"Yes, when I have seen a nice image on the internet, or just a nice meme or something like that, or when there has happened something at my internship of which I can show a picture, or a video."* Eva explained that showing someone else a meme could create a connection: *"For example, when you are sharing memes or something like that and everyone... you both think it is funny, then you also feel a connection."*

Receiving empathy from others

Not only does this form of self-expression provide a unique way to express feelings, but it can also be a way to elicit enthusiasm from others. Using photos or videos, one can express emotions and obtain feedback from others. During one observation, John showed his parents' new TV to Isabelle and Ben by sharing a video with them. He mentioned that he was curious about how the new TV would work. The others responded with interest and Isabelle explicitly mentioned her enthusiasm. In this way, she expressed her empathy for John.

[John shows a video of his parents' new TV to Isabelle and Ben]
Isabelle: *Wow.*
John: *The bottom will be black then. So, the TV is pushed upwards...*
Ben: *Is it coming from out of the wall?*
John: *No, no. They are placed behind each other, but the TV goes upwards.*
Ben: *I want to see the screen, actually. What you are seeing.*
Isabelle: *That is coming in a moment.*
Nadine: *No, it is about the speakers.*
John: *Do you mean how sharp the screen is?*

Ben: *I have looked at that as well.*

Isabelle: *That's nice, cool.*

John: *Yes, I am curious about it.*

This exchange exemplifies self-expression being communicated with the use of a video which caused a shared expression of enthusiasm. Self-expression then generates empathy from others and potentially contributes to a better connection between conversational partners. Although most of the participants did not think that their connection would be made stronger through the exchange of photos and videos, they did mention that the exchange could help in discovering more about someone's sense of humour or that it could be a way of expressing trust.

Additionally, all the participants mentioned that how others react to the exchanged photo or video is important. This is evident because intimacy forms when others express warm and sympathetic responses to one person sharing their personal feelings or information (Reis & Sharver, 1988). John mentioned that a response could also be a guide for future exchanges: *"When you find out that they don't like it, then next time you think it through before you show a picture."* Ben mentioned something similar: *"According to me, if it is always received with enthusiasm, then you tend to do it more."*

Relationships and trust

It seems that the exchange of personal information is more present in close relationships than in superficial relationships. The participants mentioned that trust is needed before one can share personal information using a smartphone. As Luuk stated, *"I don't think that you are just showing everyone certain conversations or certain pictures. I think that you need to have some kind of a basic connection, so to speak."* Ben mentioned something similar: *"The fact that someone is a friend or family member, means that there is a certain level…"*

This trust must be present during a conversation because, when sharing a photo or video on one's smartphone, the other person might also see other photos or videos that they were not meant to. Von Zezschwitz et al. (2016) found in their study that a common problem with screen-sharing was not wanting to share sensitive data. However, trust was present within this family. The participants pointed out that trust stems from knowing each other. More specifically, several participants defined trust as knowing how another person would react in different situations. Eva added that knowing someone related to knowing about their past: *"But also, for example, things about their past that made them who they are, so to speak."* Family members typically know a great deal about each other's pasts, especially family members that grew up together. Trust was most likely present between observed participants because these factors were present in their relationships. This could explain why the participants were comfortable exchanging information and content using their smartphones.

5. Conclusion and discussion

A significant amount of research regarding the effects of co-present smartphone use on social relationships has been conducted. Although examples of the negative effects of co-present smartphone use are widely found in previous studies, the positive effects of this behaviour have rarely been studied. For this reason, the current study explored the gap in the literature, namely the potential positive effects of co-present smartphone use. The study aimed to find an answer to the research question: 'To what extent and under which conditions does smartphone use positively contribute to a conversation?' In other words, the study aimed to highlight not only the possible positive effects of smartphone use during conversations but also the conditions under which this behaviour contributes to a conversation.

The results of the conducted study were found using an ethnographic approach. Insights were gathered through formal and informal interviews and participant observations, which were documented in the form of field notes. I chose this approach because of its exploratory nature, which allowed me to approach the phenomenon of co-present smartphone use in an open manner. I analysed the data in an iterative manner, which supported me to develop new and better contextualized themes. This ethnographic method allowed to find insights in the chose research environment that would have otherwise gone undiscovered. For example, the participants' statements in interviews did not always align with the behaviour they displayed during observations.

5.1 Key findings and their theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between smartphone use, relationships, and intimacy. Existing theoretical models refer to the mechanisms of ostracism and expectancy violation to explain the negative effects of co-present smartphone use (e.g. Vanden Abeele, 2020). The current study adds a more nuanced view towards the

concept of co-present smartphone use but mentions the same mechanisms. The results give answers to the different research questions introduced in the theoretical framework, namely RQ1: 'Is co-present smartphone use regarded as normative or deviant behaviour, in what contexts do these perceptions apply, and can these differing perceptions help in explaining why smartphone use may sometimes be harmful and sometimes not?', RQ2: 'In what ways can smartphone use facilitate intimacy during a conversation?'.

With respect to the first research question, this study contributes to the understanding of how people perceive the use of smartphones during conversations, how their perceptions and judgment of this behaviour is context dependent (RQ1). The participants mentioned that smartphone use during conversations is inappropriate because it contradicts the social rules that govern conversations. This result reveals that co-present smartphone use *is regarded as deviant behaviour*. However, the participants still engaged in the behaviour themselves which shows it is actually normative behaviour within this group. This aligns with Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas' (2016) finding that co-present smartphone use has become a normalized habit. It should be noted that the studied group knew each other well and that this influenced their experience of this behaviour being normal. Co-present smartphone use is observed to be context dependent. It was absent during dinner; a more formal situation. In this context it is experienced as more deviant behaviour than in contexts such as watching TV. However, in the current study there is no explanation found for this difference in use. Further research could find an explanation for this difference in use and validate whether these conclusions also count for other groups than the current studied group.

With respect to the second research question, this study contributes to the understanding of the role that intimacy plays in the contribution of smartphone use during conversations. I observed that the aspects of (1) nonverbal communication, (2) self-disclosure, and (3) exchange and interdependence through the use of smartphones contribute to an interaction by stimulating

intimacy. This evidence supports the theory of Reis and Shaver (1988) proposed in their

intimacy process model. I observed that smartphones were used as a medium of self-expression

during conversations. By sharing feelings using one's smartphone, one might receive non-verbal

and verbal empathy from other conversational partners, which ensures the maintenance of

intimacy between participants. I also observed that smartphones were frequently used as an

extended mind during conversations. By using smartphones as extended minds, the participants

were able to manage the interaction and information during conversations, such as when they

used their smartphones to fact-check something that was said. Additionally, participants used

their smartphones as measurement tools and as aids to transactive memory. Although these uses

of the smartphone were instrumental in nature, they had a positive effect on the conversations,

given that it allowed the conversation to continue and to introduce new subjects. These findings

correspond with Bunt's (1999) conversational considerations that might contribute to intimacy.

These observations indicate that *co-present smartphone use can facilitate intimacy (RQ2)*.

However, this observation needs to be nuanced: Participants wanted to see others react

with empathy and enthusiasm to their sharing of photos or videos. The fact that people have a

strong need to belong explains this wish for a positive reaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This

also shows that partner responsiveness mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and

intimacy (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Moreover, they stated that the level of self-expression that

was present in conversations depended on their relationship with each other. They needed to trust

one another to share photos or videos, which the participants demonstrated. When these criteria

were met, however, participants believed that self-expression through smartphone use does

contribute to intimacy between conversation partners. This was corroborated by my

observations. However, the studied participants already had a solid level of intimacy and further

research has to validate whether smartphones facilitate intimacy in other groups in which the

level of intimacy is lower.

Based on this ethnographic research, I can conclude that smartphone use can contribute to conversations by allowing conversational partners to exchange media and information with each other. The results of this study indicate that smartphones are not always solely used for own use in interactions but are also used to interact with each other. Both through self-expression and through the use of the smartphone as an extended mind, information is added to a conversation that might be harder to share without the use of a smartphone. The above study findings matter because its insights can be used to extend current theoretical models by also including the possible positive effects of this behaviour.

5.2 Practical implications

Several scholars have noted that there is a moral panic towards smartphone use and its effect on social relationships (Emanuel et al., 2015; Billieux et al., 2015; Hussain et al., 2017; Rao & Lingam, 2020). This moral panic is visible in several studies on co-present smartphone that adopt a 'negative effects' approach. This study shows that it is necessary to counterbalance this negative effects approach with more positively focused studies to expand the research field on this topic.

Additionally, it should be considered to make clear agreements about smartphone use during conversations on when it is considered normative and when deviant behaviour. These agreements seem to be important within groups that have a lower level of intimacy. In this way, conversations can maintain successful and intimacy can be cared for.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations

There are important limitations to this study that must be mentioned. The first limitation concerns the chosen participant sample. While this study clearly illustrates that smartphones could contribute to conversations, it also raises the question of different outcomes in other

groups and contexts. Because of the selected convenience sample, it is likely that I already had biases about this group and the behaviours of its members before the start of the study. As the researcher, I was part of the studied group which made it difficult to refrain from these biases. Future researchers could lend greater credence to the findings by selecting a sample that is not part of their own environment.

Although the ethnographic approach that I used is suitable for this study because it allowed me to gain knowledge about the difference between the behaviours and ideas of participants, there are limitations to this approach. A limitation of ethnographic research is that it entails a temporary context. The COVID-19 outbreak urged the family members to be often together. The results may be different when there are no restrictions regarding COVID-19 anymore. Additionally, it is likely that the results are outdated in five years, as technology innovates, and society changes fast. Therefore, this behaviour has to be studied more frequently.

Ethnography requires the participants to behave naturally. Because of the short period of research time, it is possible that participants did not completely act like they do in their daily lives. A longer study is required to validate these findings.

This study does not explain which functions of the smartphone are used most often during conversations. A quantitative study could be carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the use of the smartphone during conversations. For example, to measure the frequency that people exchange photos with their smartphone during conversations.

5.4 Final conclusion

This study examined the potential positive role of smartphone use during conversations. In a world in which smartphones play an important role in many people's daily lives, the findings of this thesis concerning the contributions of smartphone use to conversational experiences highlight a different perspective on this phenomenon. This study provides a more

nuanced view of smartphone use in general and allows public discussion to expand. The study

creates a starting point for further research about the positive effects of smartphone use. Readers

of this research could think about the way they react towards smartphone use during

conversations. I invite people to reflect on how smartphones are influencing conversations, and

the positive and negative consequences that might occur.

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Appendix I: Sensitizing concepts

Social Norms

(Change in) Value of interaction

Connection

Engagement

Intimacy

Self-disclosure

Verbal communication

Nonverbal communication

Exchange / interdependence

Social media use in Crisis

Appendix II: Interview guides

Interviewgids 1 (semi-structered interview, tijdens observatie)

Het semi-structered interview vindt plaats tijdens de observatie, zodat er een natuurlijke en informele setting wordt gehandhaafd. Hierdoor zullen de antwoorden op de vragen meer inzicht geven in de situatie.

Benodigdheden:

- Audio-recorder (op telefoon)

- Notitieboekje voor field notes / pen

- Interviewgids (vragen)

Vragen

Voor / Na interactie

1. Gesprekken / interacties

Omschrijf jouw ideale gesprek. Welke aspecten zijn belangrijk om een gesprek te laten slagen?

Denk je dat er normen zijn die men in acht moet nemen tijdens een gesprek?

2. Smartphonegebruik

Wat vind je van je eigen smartphonegebruik?

Wat zijn de redenen om je smartphone te gebruiken tijdens een gesprek?

Wat vind je van het gebruik van smartphones tijdens een gesprek?

Hoe kan smartphonegebruik negatieve effecten hebben op een gesprek?

Hoe kan smartphonegebruik positieve effecten hebben op een gesprek?

3. Smartphonegebruik tijdens coronacrisis

Omschrijf je smartphonegebruik tijdens de coronacrisis

Wat is er aan je smartphonegebruik veranderd tijdens de coronacrisis?

Wat vind je van smartphonegebruik in een gesprek tijdens de coronacrisis?

Waar hecht je waarde aan tijdens deze crisis?

Hoe is dit anders dan voor de crisis?

Tijdens interactie

Nadat ander smartphone gebruikt

Wat vind je ervan dat .. zijn/haar/mijn smartphone gebruikt op dit moment?

Welke aspecten zorgen hiervoor?

Wat denk je dat de ander(en) hiervan vind(en)?

Hoe ervaar je jullie gesprek/interactie?

Hoe komt dat?

Nadat deelnemer zelf smartphone gebruikt

Wat is de reden dat je nu je smartphone gebruikt?

Wat vind je ervan dat je nu je smartphone gebruikt?

Welke aspecten zorgen hiervoor?

Wat denk je dat de ander(en) vind(en)?

Hoe ervaar je jullie gesprek/interactie?

Hoe komt dat?

Opmerkingen / bijzonderheden:

Hier schrijf ik bijzonderheden op over eventuele beïnvloeding van de deelnemer

Informatie deelnemer (wordt in field notes opgeschreven)

Naam:

Geboortedatum:

Werksituatie: Fulltime / Part time / Student / Werkloos

Interviewgids 2 (opvolg)

intimiteit/ relaties opbouwen / self-disclosure, exchange

Intimiteit

- Wat is intimiteit voor jou?
- Wanneer voel jij je verbonden met iemand?
  - Wanneer deel je je emoties of gevoelens met anderen?

  - Wanneer denk je dat anderen emoties of gevoelens met jou delen?

Relaties

- Hoe onderhoud jij je band met een vriend of familielid?
- Hoe kan je zorgen dat deze band sterker wordt?

- Wanneer heb je het idee dat je iemand echt goed kent?
- Hoe zorg jij ervoor dat iemand jou goed leert kennen?

- Wat zijn dingen waar jij over praat met mensen die dichtbij je staan?
- Wat voor soort dingen zou jij bespreken of vertellen aan iemand om jullie band te

versterken?

Smartphone / relaties

- Wissel je wel eens iets uit met behulp van je telefoon tijdens een gesprek? Wat wissel je

dan uit?

  - Denk je dat deze uitwisseling iets doet met jullie onderlinge band?

  - Vind je het dan belangrijk hoe mensen hierop reageren?

  - Hoe zou je willen dat mensen hier op reageren?

Appendix III: Field notes and transcriptions (selection)

20:30 Bank TV kijken
17/04

[diagram: B, tafel, I, J, X, bank]
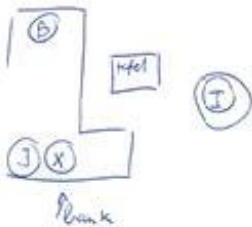
hoekbank
mensen zitten iets van elkaar af

J: 24 jaar
B: 58 jaar
I: 56 jaar
gewend
tegen - nonsociaal
interesseert - generatie

interactie weg
whatsapp gelijk
- samen kijken
- gelijk doen
- comedy kijken

- negatieve associatie telefoon gebruik
I zit buiten de groep
- opzoeken films

bij eerste programma iedereen een keer op mobiel
tweede programma niemand
↳ misschien door interesse in programma
2ᵉ → leuker want meer lachen

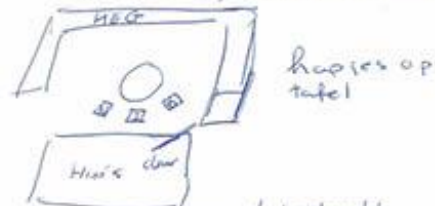Observatie 19 April

[diagram: J, B, X, I]
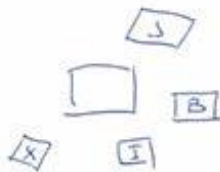
achtertuin hapjes

'ze willen ook een nieuwe badkamer'
B op telefoon
'wat heeft Ad nou gestuurd'

Scherm delen I
'grafiek kijken'
→ gespreks onderwerp verschuifd

25 april   17:30
Borrel met
Ben & Isabelle
voortuin / buiten, zonnig

[diagram]

hapjes op tafel

net gewerkend / gedoucht
B: drinkt water / wijn
   draagt trui, spijkerbroek, slippers
   net boodschappen gedaan
I: drinkt wijn
   tek. suzza's
N: drinkt water / bier
   blousje, broek, opzoeken mobiel op tafel

Interview Ben – 20 april 2020

N: Omschrijf jouw ideale gesprek.
B: Tussen twee mensen?
N: Ja
B: Over een onderwerp waar je ieder bij.. waar je allebei ideeën over hebt, die je kunt uitwisselen. Waarbij je soms door ideeën van de ander tot betere ideeën kunt komen
N: Dus een soort voortgang?
B: Ontwikkeling
N: Ontwikkeling
B: Of.. of waarbij je.. waarbij iemand iets vertelt waar je echt nog niks van wist
N: Iets nieuws?
B: Uhu.
N: En hoe.. Welke aspecten zijn belangrijk om een gesprek te laten slagen? Dus bijvoorbeeld ook verbaal, non-verbaal
B: Uhu, dat je allebei interesse hebt. Dat iemand weet waarover die het heeft.. geen eh.. dat ie geen klinkklare onzin uitkraamt
N: En non-verbaal?
B: Non-verbaal, ja dat iemand je aankijkt. Dat iemand interesse heeft, door zijn houding
N: Hoe dan, bijvoorbeeld?
B: Ja, weet ik niet.. door voorovergebogen naar je toe te bewegen, zulke dingen
N: Oké. Denk je dat er normen zijn in een gesprek?
B: Wat bedoel je met normen?
N: Hoe.. ja bepaalde ideeën over hoe iemand zich moet gedragen. Door de maatschappij opgelegd of door anderen?
B: Ja, opzich wel, opzich wel
N: Zoals?
B: Ja, Nederlandse cultuur is in ieder geval dat je… wij zijn over het algemeen vrij direct, vergeleken met het buitenland.
N: Ja
B: Dus eigenlijk is de norm, denk ik dat je niet precies mag zeggen wat je denkt
N: Juist niet?
B: Nee, nog steeds niet
N: Oké
B: En dan zijn wij nog redelijk direct. In andere landen is het nog veel indirecter. In Nederland laten wij meestal wel het achterste van onze tong zien, in het buitenland helemaal niet. Dus dat is een norm.
N: Dus het is een norm om niet alles te zeggen wat je denkt?
B: Nou, in ieder geval niet persoonlijk te worden. Zeg maar andere normen, bijvoorbeeld wij praten in Nederland niet over salaris, of over hoeveel je hebt van dingen en zo, dat zijn andere normen
N: Soort.. beetje met opscheppen te maken?
B: Calvinistisch is dat een beetje, noemen ze dat. Conservatief, wij zijn niet zo heel open, we leggen niet alles.. al onze vuile was buiten. Praten ook niet over eh.. dat het slecht gaat met je kinderen of zo, of slecht in je relatie. In het zuiden bijvoorbeeld, in Spanje, Italië, daar is dat veel opener. Terwijl wij wel.. wij zijn wel veel persoonlijker over wat we ervan vinden.

N: Oké. Maar je bent dus persoonlijk over wat je ervan vindt maar je mag niet alles zeggen, zeg maar?

B: Nee, wij zijn redelijk direct als Nederlander, maar het is niet gebruikelijk om heel erg.. wij zijn direct over onze mening, zeg maar

N: Ja.

B: Over een inhoudelijk onderwerp, maar over onze privé-persoon laten we minder.. spreken we minder vrij uit

N: Oké. Dan wil ik het hebben over smartphone-gebruik

B: Hmm.

N: Wat vind je van je eigen smartphone-gebruik?

B: Goh. Ja. Ik denk dat ik het om.. Volgens mij zijn er 2, 3 dingen, 2 of 3 dingen waarvoor ik het gebruik. 1 is uit verveling, dus een paar spelletjes of zo doe ik, dat is meer om de tijd te doden als ik tijd over heb of zo. En de andere is dat ik dingen opzoek die ik graag wil weten, zoals het nieuws of het weer of.. iets anders. En een heel klein beetje… troep; roddel, Boer Zoekt Vrouw.

N: Facebook?

B: Nee, Facebook zit ik bijna niet op

N: Waar zoek je die troep dan?

B: Ja..

N: Komt gewoon voorbij?

B: Nee, als je die naar rechts swipe't, dan krijg je die nieuws feeds, dat is NU.nl en zo.. dat is actueel. En als je hierop klikt krijg je het nieuws wat trending is. Kijk, Boer Zoekt Vrouw boerin Annemiek, is bijvoorbeeld trending in nieuws **(laat mobiel zien).** Dat is van Google wat het meest gezocht wordt. Daar klik ik wel eens op, maar dat is minimaal. Het meeste is informatie. Is er nog nieuws op de NOS? Gaat het nog regenen? Wat voor weer wordt het morgen, dat soort dingen zoek ik op.

N: Oké.

B: En dan nog een paar spelletjes

N: Wat vind je van het gebruik van smartphones tijdens een gesprek?

B: Ja, dat linkt een beetje aan wat voor soort gesprekken je hebt. Ik vind wel.. soms wel handig om informatie waar je het niet over eens bent, dat je die even snel kunt opzoeken.

N: Want?

B: Nou ja, dan heb je de feitelijkheden goed. Stel je zegt: Hoeveel doden waren er vandaag? Of eh.. dat je zegt dat waren er meer of minder, dat je het snel op kunt zoeken. Dat vind ik een voordeel. Ik vind het niet altijd.. als je echt in gesprek bent als iemand op zijn telefoon gaat, dat vind ik niet eh.. vind ik… dan past een beetje bij.. dan lijkt het alsof je geen aandacht meer hebt.

N: Ja

B: Maar dan gaat het vooral over, zeg maar als je Whatsapp binnenkrijgt.. als mensen Whatsapp berichten binnenkrijgen en die waarschuwingen staan aan en zo, dan vind ik dat storend, opzich.

N: Oké, hmm..

B: Maar ja, dat doe ik zelf dan ook, denk ik. Dus het leidt snel af.

N: Oké, dus je doet het zelf ook wel.

B: Hmm.

N: Maar je vindt het eigenlijk niet oké als andere mensen het doen?

B: Nee, ik vind het gewoon in absolute zin niet oké. Ik vind het van mijzelf ook niet oké.

N: Oké, maar je doet het wel. Het is dus gewenning?

B: Ja, het is dus een vorm van gewenning ja.

N: Maar wen je dan ook aan dat mensen het gebruiken?

B: Ja, wat ik zeg. Het gaat een beetje over eh.. ja, soms wel soms niet

N: Dus het ligt aan hoe diep het gesprek is?

B: Hoe diep het gesprek is, de frequentie, de timing.

N: Oké, ehm.. Ja, dus hoe kan het negatieve effecten hebben op een gesprek? Smartphone-gebruik.

B: Nou ja dat het de indruk wekt dat mensen niet luisteren of geen interesse hebben of iets anders belangrijker vinden, dat ze eigenlijk liever ergens anders zouden zijn, met iemand anders of communiceren met iemand anders. Het is net zoiets als dat je in een gesprek zit met drieën en je mag.. niemand praat met jou.

N: Beetje buitengesloten?

B: Ja, soort van buitengesloten, in hele lichte vorm

N: Oké. En hoe kunnen mensen ervoor zorgen dat jij je niet buitengesloten voelt in een gesprek? Los van mobiel.

B: Ja, een andere vorm, zoals ik net in het begin zei. Dat je gewoon aandacht hebt voor elkaar en dat je luistert en vragen stelt en dat je niet iets hoeft te herhalen, omdat iemand op zijn telefoon zit; "Huh, wat zei je?" Ja dan.. dan eh..

N: En hoe kan smartphone-gebruik positieve effecten hebben op een gesprek?

B: Nou ja, dus dat eh.. als je inderdaad een inhoudelijk gesprek hebt, dat de informatie beter is.

N: Dus het is belangrijk dat de informatie goed is? Dat het klopt?

B: Nou ja, ik vind.. voor mij is dat belangrijk. Kan je over.. voor sommige mensen, interesseert het niet. Dat heeft met het type gesprek. Jij vroeg in het begin welke gesprekken vind ik interessant, ja ik vind gesprekken die ergens over gaan. Die dus een informatie hebben, die vind ik.. dat zegt meer over mij, ik ben heel erg gericht op informatie. Dus dan vind ik ook de bijdrage van een smartphone aan informatie belangrijk. Als je veel meer over gevoelens of over dat soort dingen zou praten, dan heb je misschien totaal geen interesse in die smartphone.

N: Oké, dus jij vindt het ook positief als iemand anders bijvoorbeeld iets opzoekt tijdens een gesprek?

B: Ja, als ik zeg van: ja dat weet ik eigenlijk niet precies, oh ik kijk even. Of een feitje.. of.. in alles

N: Of doe je dat dan liever zelf?

B: Nee hoor, dat maakt mij niet uit. Wie scoorde de goal? Eh.. dat soort dingetjes als je over voetbal zit te praten. Wanneer was dat nou ook alweer, dat je een jaartal opzoekt of zo

N: Oké

B: Maar ja, soms is het ook niet belangrijk. Dus als je in een gesprek zit en je zegt: oh we waren op vakantie in Kroatië, wanneer was dat? Dan maakt het denk ik niet zo veel uit dat iemand nou een kwartier gaat zitten zoeken om te vinden wanneer dat was, dan vind ik dat weer ja..

N: Het is meer zo van als je aankondigt van zoek even op. Dat je zeg maar iemand..

B: Als je het echt wilt.. het feit echt wilt weten

N: Dat je iemand toestemming geeft, eigenlijk

B: Nou, nee. Als het echt een belangrijk feit is

N: Oké

B: Als je nu ziet, naar zo'n corona bijvoorbeeld. Neem het nou.. Gaat die grafiek nou naar beneden of blijft die neutraal? Dus dan is het wel een verschil of dat nu nog 1400 mensen op de

IC liggen of dat dat ondertussen 1350 zijn. Dus dan vind ik die grafiek wel interessant om te zien. Dat vind ik belangrijk.

N: Oké, omschrijf je smartphonegebruik tijdens deze corona-crisis.

B: Ja, voor mij is dat niet veel anders als anders.

N: Dat is gewoon hetzelfde?

B: Ja, ik denk wel dat ik iets meer richt op die NOS live blog, dat kijk ik. Dus ja je hebt.. je went daar dan iets aan.

N: Dus nieuws vooral?

B: Ja ik kijk dan altijd rond 2 uur 's middags, want dan zijn de nieuwe cijfers bekend. Ik kijk om een uur of 5, dan zijn de IC cijfers. En al die andere informatie, daar kijk ik eigenlijk niet zo naar, vind ik allemaal iets te veel.

N: Oké

B: Dus ik vind het niet zo interessant eh.. wat eh.. hoe heet ie.. Jantje Smit doet met de corona of zo, dat boeit me niet.

N: Ehm… Dus het is een heel klein beetje veranderd, niet echt heel erg

B: Nee, eigenlijk hetzelfde

N: Je kijkt niet.. denk je dat je meer of minder op je mobiel zit? Of even veel

B: Nee, even veel zou ik zeggen. Nou, misschien iets meer, omdat je niet op pad bent.

N: Ja oké, omdat je thuis zit

B: En weer iets minder omdat je.. ik app wat minder met Isabelle. Wij appen natuurlijk over dag nog wel eens een keer naar elkaar en nu zie je elkaar de hele dag

N: En wat is fijner?

B: Ik app wel eens naar boven: ben je al wakker? *lacht hard*

N: Wat.. vind je het fijner om..

B: Nee, dat..

N: Persoonlijk of app? Of maakt niet uit?

B: Nee, ja. Appen is een vervanging voor eh.. dat je heel snel even informatie kan delen. Dus dat is handig als je.. als je er bent, heb je dat dus niet nodig

N: Oké, heb je een andere mening over smartphone-gebruik in een gesprek, omdat het nu crisis is?

B: Nee

N: Dus de normen en zo blijven hetzelfde?

B: Ja

N: Oké, en waar hecht je waarde aan tijdens deze crisis?

B: Aan goede informatie. Dus we kijken veel journaal alleen eh.. Nadine heeft daar een hekel aan. Dus we kijken meer journaal als.. als eh.. als anders.

N: Oké

B: Omdat we toch wel graag goed geïnformeerd blijven

N: Nog andere dingen waar je waarde aan hecht?

B: Nee, ja straks misschien wel. Ben wel benieuwd bijvoorbeeld met zo'n app. Ja dan denk ik wel dat het heel erg, vind ik wel belangrijk. Ik zou daar wel heel graag aan deelnemen

N: Oké

B: Voor mij is dan bijvoorbeeld privacy vind ik echt gewoon.. eh.. ja dat interesseert mij echt geen zak.

N: Hmm. Ehm… ja dus de waarde die je hecht tijdens deze crisis is niet heel erg veranderd ten opzichte van voor de crisis. Behalve dan dat je meer nieuws kijkt.

B: Ietsje, ja

N: Oké, dat was het

B: Oké