

COMMUNICATION INCOMPETENCE AS THE CAUSAL ESCALATION FACTOR OF DIVORCE CASES AMONGST MALAYSIAN MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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Abstract

Communication competence serves as the basis of effective interactions amongst mankind since the dawn of civilization. Its importance has engulfed all avenues of known communication levels, beginning from intrapersonal until the most recent artificial intelligence domain. In the light of communication competence in marriage, addressing your couple correctly while performing every interaction requires consistent upgrading of evolving communication knowledge, understanding, and skills. More, communication incompetence had been affirmed as the dominant causal escalation factor towards aggressive verbal arguments – of which, in most cases had lead to domestic violence before ending up with divorce by numerous official bodies, such as JAKIM and Selangor Syariah Judiciary Department. Hitherto, this research embarked its journey upon the objective of determining the perception of Malaysian millennial generation upon communication incompetence as the causal escalation factor of divorce cases amongst them. For that, proportionate purposive random sampling was adapted, and 400 university students' perception (single, married, divorced) from four public universities in Klang Valley became the focus. Purposively, only respondent within the age of 21 to 23 years old were selected. This is due to the fact that Klang Valley's university students had long been the catalyst of change for Malaysia's future and beyond. Those demographically diverse respondents were reached via online questionnaires' dissemination, and quantitative data were later analysed using SPSS (version 30.0, 2024). The pinnacle of this study is expressed via vital suggestion that a formal educational training program on effective marital communication should promptly be constructed (especially for Malaysian millennial generation – single, married, and divorced) – and such program should transcend all racial and religious boundaries.

Keywords: *Communication Incompetence, Millennial Generation, Escalating Divorce Cases, Social Media, Competent Marital Communication*

1.0 Introduction

Marriage is generally embraced by all societies and religions as a sacred bond that should consistently be guarded and defended of its sanctity. Ironically within this age of globalisation, there had been an escalation of divorce cases amongst the Malaysian millennial generation – in comparison to the previous generation. More and more divorce cases involving newly married millennial couples had been escalating lately. For the past few years, its tremendous rate had been affirmed by numerous statutory marriage-related bodies, such as JAKIM and Selangor Syariah Judiciary Department. Inevitably, these phenomena have triggered distressful societal polemic of the contemporaries.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Millennial Generation

By definition, ‘millennial generation’ are those who were born circa early 1980s till early 2000s [1]. Meaning that, they are now between 20 to 45 years of age according to today’s calculation. As for the meaning of ‘communication incompetence’, we must first comprehend the definition of ‘communication competence’. According to Morreale, S.P. (2012) in *Competent and Incompetent Communication*, the empirical research on communication competence begun in the late 1970s till early 1980s [2].

Those early researches concluded that individuals who possessed ‘communication competence’ will always be perceived, among others, as displaying significant elements of interactive behavior, consistently helpful, and highly emphatic (ibid.). In the later decades, researchers of ‘communication competence’ further explored the domain by connecting all the significant elements with the sense of responsibility while performing such deeds (ibid.).

2.2 Communication Incompetence

In the context of this research, the ‘communication incompetence’ refers to all the opposite behaviours of the underlined elements of ‘communication competence’ – of which, it eventually leads to divorce. Such ‘communication incompetence’ will definitely carve the paths to heighten jealousy, pounding envy, escalating hatred, and raging enmity in marital interactions – of which, all will eventually lead to divorce. This distressful societal polemic had been affirmed by the findings by Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), when the derived 2007 data displayed a total of 32.2% marriage ended with divorce within the 5 years of marriage, whereas the other 27.7% of divorces occurred within 6 to 10 years of marriage [3].

This displayment of data had further affirmed by researcher Ghazali, S.E. (Sinar Harian, 24 November 2023) from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) by stating that, apart from most of the divorcees were faced by issues of jobless and degradation of living quality, they were all had been incompetent in marital communication [4].

2.3 Definition of Divorce

‘Divorce’ by the definition of Oxford University Press is ‘the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body’ [1]. According to *Aplikasi Nikah Cerai Ruju’ Pulau Pinang: Capaian Awam Atas Talian* (an official portal of Penang State Government, Malaysia), ‘divorce is an act of untying knot, freeing, et cetera’; whereas according to Islam jurisprudence, it means ‘untying the marriage knot through the verbal or non-verbal expression of words ‘*talaq*’, or any act that brought the similar intention or meaning’ [5].

According to Rozlan, M.F.B. (2022) in *Analisis Kasus Perceraian Akibat Pandemi Covid-19 di Selangor*, the Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia had encountered an amplified number of divorce cases by 2.3 times higher than the previous year [3]. The causal factor was due to the communication incompetence that had been deliberately allowed to prolong within the marriage without any initiation in finding professionally assistance (ibid.).

2.4 Dominant Causal Escalation Factor for Divorce

Concisely, communication incompetence stood as the dominant causal escalation factor to other negative realms such as aggressive verbal arguments and chronic mental anxieties amongst married couples – of which, in most cases had lead to domestic violence before ending up with divorce [3]. In fact, in another research involving 166 respondents by Rahman et al. (2014) determined that married couples between 27 to 37 of age had yielded the highest percentage (by 47%) of experiencing marriage conflict before ended up with divorce [6]. Moreover, *Sinar Harian* on 24 November 2023 (in ‘*Ramai Pasangan Muda Bercerai*’ news article), had affirmed that the majority of Malaysia’s contemporary divorce cases were contributed by those within 5 years of marriage (ibid.).

3.0 Research Objective

Generally this research aimed at determining the perception of Malaysian millennial generation upon communication incompetence as the causal escalation factor of divorce cases amongst them. Tagged with that objective are three specific objectives: (1) To determine the perception of Malaysian millennial generation upon divorce sentiment due to communication incompetence; (2) To determine the perception of Malaysian millennial generation upon the impact of divorce cases' escalation due to communication incompetence; and, (3) To determine the perception of Malaysian millennial generation upon other causal escalation factors of divorce amongst them.

4.0 Theoretical Framing

Two theories were applied for this research: (1) Interpersonal Communication Theory by Berger, C.R. and Calabrese, R.J., 1975 [7]; and (2) Relational Communication Theory by Rogers, L.E. and Farace, V.R., 1975 [8]. According to Interpersonal Communication Theory, the continuous quality relationship between individuals require competent communication [7]. It emphasised on the importance of information exchange, understanding, and emotional expression in developing and maintaining balanced and harmonious relationship between two individuals (ibid.). In the light of this theory, research findings affirmed that the communication incompetence was the most dominant factor that lead to heighten divorce cases amongst the Malaysian millennial generation. Their negligence in empowering themselves with profound marital communication knowledge and skills was later tagged along with their comparative immaturity (mostly due to their young age) in comparison to older generations. All of those aspects had been discussed by this theory for many decades since its founding in 1960s (ibid.).

Whereas Relational Communication Theory by Rogers, L.E., & Farace, V.R., in 1975 emphasised on the consistency in management aspects of the already developed interpersonal relationship between the involoving individuals [8]. It stressed upon continous effort in preserving, empowering, and nurturing the existing relationship without any boundaries (ibid.).

In the light of this research, the reluctance of couples in involving with decent consultation to solve tiny marital conflicts (that sparked at the very beginnning, for instance), has resulted in developing bigger conflict as time escalated. Newly married coupled frequently begun their marriage with mere tolerance, without trying to resolve matters immediately and professionally. Whereas according to Rahman, et al. (2022), few people realised that tolerant behavior would bring negative implications in the long run – and eventually what begins as a spark would develop into an inferno at the end of the day [9].

5.0 Research Methodology

This research adapted quantitative purposive random sampling. Data collection process were attained throuh the dissemination of self-administered questionnaires via online google form application. The decision in adapting to purposive random sampling was in accordance with McLeod, S. (2019) suggestions in searching for reliable data [10]. The method was chosen in accordance to the research title. Of which, the research population is purposively studying on students who had been married or divorced while still studying. However, the specific respondents were randomly chosen from four public universities in the Klang Valley. Thus, a total of 400 respondents from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), and Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM), were proportionately selected.

Moreover, set of self-administered questionnaire was chosen due to: (1) Set of properly constructed questionnaires will never create difficulties of understanding amongst the involoving respondents; and, (2) Set of properly constructed questionnaires are time, energy and cost saving tools.

During data collection processes, every respondent was contacted via emails by which, their addresses were derived from respective Student Bodies of the involoving universities. The first segment of the questionnaires dealt with demographic information. Whereas the later segment (Segment B, C, and D) dealt with the respondents' perception on the researched topic. Throughout Segment B, C, and D, the unidimensional Likert scales were extensively applied, i.e. (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree;

(3) Agree; (4) Strongly Agree. Moreover, all of the questionnaires were constructed after referring to Wimmer, R.D. & Dominick, J.R., 2020 [11], and Babbie, E.R., 2020 suggested techniques [12]. All of the first segment (Segment A: Demographic questionnaires) were posed to determine the independent variables of this research. The remaining Segment B, C, and D were constructed to measure the dependent variables of this research. The details are displayed on Table 3 below:

TABLE 1
Proportionate Samplings of Four Klang Valley Public Universities

Universities	Proportion
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	100 students
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	100 students
Universiti Malaya (UM)	100 students
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	100 students
Total	400 students

The proportionate samplings were in accordance with suggestions by Krejcie, R.V. and Daryle, W.M. in 1970 [13]. Throughout the data collection process, remarkably all respondents had been highly cooperative by returning their completed and useable questionnaires form. The process of data gatherings began in mid-October 2024. All data (demographic and quantitative perception) were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Science for Windows (SPSS version 30.0, 2024). Data collection for this research begun immediately after the pre-test of alpha levels on independent variables yielded more than 0.05, and the overall research instrument yielded 0.81 of alpha value.

6.0 Research Findings and Discussions

Demographic Findings

Demographically, the number of female respondents (64%) is significantly higher than that of male respondents (36%) as displayed in Table 2 below. The age group began in circa 21 years old due to the normal admission age for Malaysian higher learning institutions.

The majority in this section were clustered at circa of 23 years old by 40%, whilst the second highest score were clustered within circa 22 years old (33%). This range makes sense since most university students got married during the second year of their study. Further in Table 2, the highest score for race item was Malay (90%), followed by Chinese (19%), Others (16%) and Indian (10%). The reason why the percentage of Others in race category was high, is due to the fact that this research involved UIAM (which comprised of vast number of foreign students).

As for the Marital Status, most of the respondents (55%) are still single, 35% were married, and the remaining 10% were divorced. The final section is Year of Study, which yielded the highest score of 49% (Year Three and above), followed by 28% (Year Two) and 23% for Year One.

TABLE 2
Demography Findings

Items	Demography	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	36
	Female	256	64

Age	Circa 21years old	108	27
	Circa 22 years old	132	33
	Circa 23 years old	160	40
Race	Malay	220	55
	Chinese	76	19
	Indian	40	10
	Others	64	16
Marital Status	Single	220	55
	Married	140	35
	Divorced	40	10
Year of Study	Year One	92	23
	Year Two	112	28
	Year Three and above	196	49

RO1: Perception of Malaysian Millennial Generation upon Divorce Sentiment due to Communication Incompetence

Referring to Table 3, it displayed various responses to divorce sentiments amongst the respondents. The highest score yielded on a positive statement: *In my opinion, divorce could be avoided if couple learnt competent marital communication skills before getting married* by 76% (mean 3.72).

However, the second highest score fell on negative statement: *In my opinion, divorce cases in my generation are exaggerated small issues that shouldn't become the focus of discussion by my society* today by 67% (mean 3.50).

The third highest score was shared by two different statements: *In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation is because of parents from both divorced couples have failed to console them* (by 36%); and: *In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation has nothing to do with the failure of parents from both divorced couples in consoling them* (by 36%).

The lowest score of this section resided on the positive statement: *In my opinion, divorce could be avoided if couple learnt competent marital communication skills before getting married* by 1%. This demonstrated that majority of Malaysian millennial generation agreed that competent communication skills are essential in marriage. These findings demonstrated the constant demand for quality relationship (derived from pre-marital knowledge on competent marital communication) between couple, as emphasised by Berger, C.R. and Calabrese, R.J. in 1975 via Interpersonal Communication Theory [7].

TABLE 3
Malaysian Millennial Generation's Perception upon Divorce Sentiment due to Communication Incompetence

Statements	Percentage (%)				Mean	Std. dev.
	1	2	3	4		
In my opinion, divorce must be avoided regardless of any reasons or obstacles faced in a marriage.	16	21	28	35	2.82	1.086
In my opinion, divorce is the best solution when unresolved reasons or obstacles faced in marriage	27	32	24	17	2.31	1.051
In my opinion, divorce could be avoided if couple learnt competent marital communication skills before getting married.	1	2	21	76	3.72	0.552

In my opinion, divorce couldn't be avoided even if couple have learnt competent marital communication skills before getting married.	37	34	19	10	2.02	0.985
In my opinion, divorce cases in my generation are important issue that should be the focus of discussion by my society today.	33	22	24	21	2.33	1.146
In my opinion, divorce cases in my generation are exaggerated small issues that shouldn't become the focus of discussion by my society today.	2	13	18	67	3.50	0.798
In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation is an embarrassment to myself.	27	31	23	19	2.34	1.075
In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation is normal and I am not affected.	25	21	31	23	2.52	1.105
In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation is because of parents from both divorced couples have failed to console them.	12	31	36	21	2.66	0.945
In my opinion, the increasing number of divorce cases in my generation has nothing to do with the failure of parents from both divorced couples in consoling them.	11	34	36	19	2.63	0.917

Note: 1 = Totally disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Totally agree

RO2: Perception of Malaysian Millennial Generation upon the Impact of Divorce Cases' Escalation due to Communication Incompetence

Layers of insights were triggered from the derived data in Table 4 upon the essentiality of mustering the knowledge and skills of communication competence in marriage. Foremost, Malaysian millennial generation agreed that they should first embrace the fact that communication competence is vital in marriage: *In my opinion, sufficient understanding on the importance of competent marital communication before marriage could prevent divorce in my generation* by the highest score of 66%, and highest mean by 3.59. Total score for Agree and Totally Agree is 93%.

Based upon that comparisons, we may conclude that Malaysian millennial generation had considerable realization upon the impertinence of continuous upgrading in the derived communication skills. This finding is congruent with the Relational Communication Theory emphasised by Rogers, L.E. and Farace, V.R. in 1975, on such matter [8]. Even more important is the fact that Malaysian millennial generation demanded for significant programs in assisting their treacherous path of marriage via the third highest statement (scored 49%): *In my opinion, the lack of proper program in providing competent marital communication skills in marriage is the major cause of divorce in my generation*.

Evidently as mentioned by Rahman, S.N.A. et al. (2022), the dangerous realm of today's digital communication era lies in the demand for consistency in updating competent communication knowledge and skills should be the apex of contemplation to all generation's strata – be it of contemporary, or of the future and beyond [9].

TABLE 4

Malaysian Millennial Generation's Perception upon the Impact of Divorce Cases' Escalation due to Communication Incompetence

Statements	Percentage (%)				Mean	Std. dev.
	1	2	3	4		
In my opinion, the lack of competent marital communication skills in marriage is the major cause of divorce in my generation.	2	9	51	38	3.25	0.702

In my opinion, the lack of competent marital communication skills in marriage is not the major cause of divorce in my generation.	27	48	13	12	2.10	0.937
In my opinion, the lack of proper program in providing competent marital communication skills in marriage is the major cause of divorce in my generation.	1	10	40	49	3.37	0.706
In my opinion, the lack of proper program in providing competent marital communication skills in marriage is not the major cause of divorce in my generation.	32	46	14	18	1.98	0.887
In my opinion, effective face-to-face communication between married couples could avoid my generation from divorce.	1	10	41	48	3.36	0.704
In my opinion, frequent face-to-face communication between married couples couldn't avoid my generation from divorce	25	51	13	11	2.10	0.905
In my opinion, I should consistently upgrade my knowledge and skills on competent marital communication before marriage, while in marriage, or even after I had been divorced.	2	5	36	57	3.48	0.689
In my opinion, knowledge and skills on competent marital communication is no longer important to me after I had been divorced.	39	42	8	11	1.91	0.954
In my opinion, sufficient understanding on the importance of competent marital communication before marriage could prevent divorce in my generation.	0	7	27	66	3.59	0.621
In my opinion, insufficient understanding on the importance of competent marital communication before marriage is not the major cause of divorce in my generation.	38	40	14	8	1.92	0.918

Note: 1 = Totally disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Totally agree

RO3: Perception of Malaysian Millennial Generation upon Other Causal Escalation Factors of Divorce Amongst Them.

The highest score displayed on Table 5 resided on statement: *In my opinion, the usage of social media platforms to spread personal marriage problems has amplified the tendency of divorce in my generation* by 66% (with the highest mean of 3.59).

In comparison, mean 3.59 is shared with the statement: *In my opinion, sufficient understanding on the importance of competent marital communication before marriage could prevent divorce in my generation*, of RO2. Comparatively, we may draw a conclusion that when these two elements were combined, divorce seemed inevitable. In addition, the second highest score of RO3 resided on statement: *In my opinion, work-related pressure (at the office) or being jobless had been the major contributing factor to the rising divorce cases in my generation* of which, yielded 57% (with 3.48 mean). While the third highest score is on statement: *In my opinion, financial difficulties (apart from communication incompetence) faced by married couples is definitely becoming the other major factor that leads to divorce in my generation* by 49% (with its mean score of 3.37).

TABLE 5

Malaysian Millennial Generation's Perception upon Other Causal Escalation Factors of Divorce Amongst Them

Statements	Peratus (%)				Mean	Std. dev.
	1	2	3	4		
In my opinion, the excessive inclination of married couple in communicating via social media platforms (rather than face-to-face) has increased the tendency of divorce in my generation.	2	9	51	38	3.25	0.702
In my opinion, the excessive inclination of married couple in communicating via social media platforms (rather than face-to-face) has not increased the tendency of divorce in my generation.	27	48	13	12	2.10	0.937
In my opinion, financial difficulties (apart from communication incompetence) faced by married couples is definitely becoming the other major factor that leads to divorce in my generation.	1	10	40	49	3.37	0.706
In my opinion, financial difficulties (apart from communication incompetence) faced by married couples is not definitively the major factor that leads to divorce in my generation	32	46	14	18	1.98	0.887
In my opinion, the excessive interference from the parent and family in-laws is becoming the contributing major factor to divorce in my generation.	1	10	41	48	3.36	0.704
In my opinion, the excessive interference from the parent and family in-laws has never been he contributing major factor to divorce in my generation.	25	51	13	11	2.10	0.905
In my opinion, work-related pressure or being jobless had been the major contributing factor to the rising divorce cases in my generation	2	5	36	57	3.48	0.689
In my opinion, work- related pressure or being jobless had never been the major contributing factor to the rising divorce cases in my generation	39	42	8	11	1.91	0.954
In my opinion, the usage of social media platforms to spread personal marriage problems has amplified the tendency of divorce in my generation.	0	7	27	66	3.59	0.621
In my opinion, the usage of social media platforms to spread personal marriage problems has brought minor implication in amplifying the tendency of divorce in my generation.	38	40	14	8	1.92	0.918

Note: 1 = Totally disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Totally agree

Thus, to summarize the findings for RO3, there were three major contributing factors towards escalating divorce cases amongst Malaysian millennial generation – apart from communication incompetence:

- (1.) The usage of social media platforms to spread personal marriage problems;
- (2) The incompetence in handling work-related pressure or being jobless; and
- (3) The inability to manage financial difficulties amongst married couples.

All of the three summation of R03 conformed with both theories: Interpersonal Communication Theory by Berger, C.R. and Calabrese, R.J. founded in 1975 [7]; and Relational Communication Theory by Rogers, L.E. and Farace, V.R. which was founded in the same year [8]. As mentioned before, continuous quality relationship between individuals required the couple to possess competent

communication knowledge and skills – as emphasised by the first theory. Evidently, all of the newly-wed couples of Malaysian millennial generation should emphasise on the importance of information exchange, understanding, and emotional expression in order to develop and maintain harmonious relationship between them [7]. And after acquiring such knowledge and skills, the newly-wed couples of Malaysian millennial generation should continuously be upgrading their knowledge and skills as emphasised by Rogers, L.E. and Farace, V.R. (1975) in Relational Communication Theory [8].

7.0 Conclusion

Without prejudice, as emphasised by Rahman et al. (2023), today's new media is hugely Western-influenced and promotes popular culture values that brought global mankind to the threshold of cyber revolution [14]. It literally moving with the speed of light by opening-up endless opportunities and transforming our whole existence from the moment microchip was invented (ibid). Thus, findings of this research had yielded that communication incompetence in marital interaction amongst Malaysian millennial generation became the most dominant causal escalation factor of divorce cases amongst them. Such incompetence were due to the lack of skillful knowledge, improper usage of social media platforms, and accelerating financial difficulties that were faced by Malaysian millennial generation. The pinnacle findings of this research is sealed with a vital suggestion that a formal educational program and training for effective marital communication program must be constructed for Malaysian millennial generation (single, married, or divorced) – and such program should transcend all boundaries of race and religion. All of all, this research had pointed out the essentiality of being adaptive to change from all segments of Malaysian society, especially amongst Malaysian millennial generation and the existing educational and ministerial bodies. In fact, as rigorously emphasised by Rahman et al. (2023), the entire Malaysian must garner all the relevant abilities in manoeuvring the unprecedented demands and the ever-shifting challenges brought by this post vicennial era of new media revolution [15]. Of which, had never been faced and navigated by any nation before breaking dawn of this perilous millennium.

8.0 References

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