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## DIGITAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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# UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF DAY CARE SERVICE USERS

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### Abstract

Interpersonal communication typically involves two individuals engaging in dialogue, whether acquainted or unfamiliar. However, when individuals engage in conversation after a recent encounter, there is a tendency for uncertainty to arise. Uncertainty and anxiety surface when one lacks information about their conversational partner, compelling them to employ strategies to reduce this uncertainty. This study aims to elucidate the types of uncertainty experienced by parents utilizing the services of "Teman Kecil" Day Care for their children and explore their strategies for alleviating uncertainty using the Uncertainty Reduction Theory proposed by Berger and Calabrese. Employing a case study approach, the researchers gathered qualitative data through in-depth interviews with parents and caregivers at "Teman Kecil" Day Care. The findings reveal that parents experience cognitive uncertainty, wherein they feel unsure about the situations their children will encounter while in the care of "Teman Kecil" Day Care. To mitigate this uncertainty, parents actively employ strategies such as conducting surveys through social media platforms like Instagram, consulting Google Reviews, and seeking advice from peers with prior daycare experiences. Additionally, parents passively employ strategies by observing the caregivers at "Teman Kecil" Day Care. Lastly, parents employ interactive strategies to comprehensively understand the forthcoming situations, engaging in face-to-face communication with caregivers to acquire the necessary information.

**Keywords:** Day Care; Human Communication; Interpersonal Communication; Uncertainty Reduction;

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### Introduction

Based on data from Badan Pusat Statistik in 2022, around 35% of the formal workforce in Indonesia are women. Women's choice to work is familiar amidst the issue of equal roles between men and women. The view of women's roles being limited to domestic affairs and childcare is now starting to shift. Many women choose not only to be housewives after marriage but also to become careerwomen. When choosing to become a career woman, there are many ways that parents, especially mothers, can share the role of care while leaving their children to work. One is using daycare services (Fitriani & Arifah, 2022).

Based on the Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs Number 2 of 2008 (article 1 paragraph 1), daycare is a children's social service institution that provides holistic and integrative services to toddlers aged over three months to five years in the form care and nurturing, nutritional fulfillment, social guidance, mental spiritual, educational stimulants, games, and recreation. Daycare is a means of childcare in groups, usually carried out during working hours. Daycare is one way to provide care to

children who are less able to receive complete parental care, not to replace parental duties in caring for children (Patmonodewo, 1999).

Nowadays, daycare is an alternative to help unravel the burden of childcare. Parenting in daycare is usually carried out by professional caregivers who play an essential role in child development. The role of caregivers is not only to meet physical needs but also to fulfill psychological needs and provide stimulation to spur children's optimal growth and development. Parents often feel worried and anxious when deciding to use daycare services. Although they have conducted surveys and searched for safe and comfortable daycare in the selection process, parents will generally experience uncertainty. The main reason for this uncertainty is that parents need to learn about the caregiver, and they have never had experience using daycare services.

A sense of uncertainty and anxiety will arise when someone does not know information about the interlocutor and will be encouraged to do something to reduce the sense of uncertainty. In this stage, interpersonal communication plays a role in reducing perceived uncertainty. Berger and Calabrese state in (West & Turner, 2018) that communication is a means by which people reduce uncertainty with each other. Moreover, reduced uncertainty will create a mature condition for developing interpersonal relationships. The research journal "Uncertainty Reduction Process Members Of Virtual Community Toko Bagus Arek Arek Temanggung On Facebook" proves that interpersonal communication influences the process of reducing uncertainty even though it is done virtually (Firmansyah et al., 2019).

The thing that wants to be studied in this study is the uncertainty experienced by parents about the communication that occurs with the Teman Kecil Day Care caregiver who will take care of their children while left at work. Researchers want to know the type of uncertainty experienced and the strategies used to reduce this uncertainty. The difference from previous research is in the focus of research. In this study, the authors will discuss the strategies carried out in reducing uncertainty, while in previous studies, the focus of the research was on the process of reducing uncertainty with several axiomatic stages in the theory of uncertainty reduction.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Interpersonal Communication**

Interpersonal communication is dominant in daily activity because humans, as social beings, are part of a community system that cannot be separated from the interaction between one another. Interpersonal communication is a process of exchanging information, ideas, opinions, and feelings between two or more people and usually needs to be formally organized. Deddy (Mulyana, 2010) explains that interpersonal communication occurs between two people directly where they see each other. Hence, information is exchanged verbally and non-verbally with direct reactions (Ningsih & Adani, 2022).

Interpersonal communication builds, maintains, damages, and sometimes repairs these interpersonal relationships. Communication is closely related to individual backgrounds. Knowledge, perception, and culture will influence the condition or quality of communication in the individual concerned (Peranginangin & Perbawaningsih, 2010)

Interpersonal communication is also related to the relationship between communicants and communicators. They communicate in a mutually beneficial, interdependent relationship and create satisfaction for both parties (Suranto, 2011). Interpersonal communication is essential, for example, in the first meeting because it is dialogic, which means there is direct communication feedback. Relationships in interpersonal communication are significant because the success of communication, especially for long-term communication, depends on relationships used to determine the continuation of communication at the beginning of the meeting.

### **Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

This research uses the Uncertainty Reduction Theory by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975. This theory is one of the theories of interpersonal communication. It is hard to start communicating when two people meet for the first time. It causes much discomfort or subjective judgment, leading to questions (West & Turner, 2018). These questions will give rise to positive or negative conjectures so that various uncertainties will arise. Uncertainty Reduction Theory aims to explain how communication is used to reduce uncertainty among strangers engaging in a conversation with each other for the first time. This theory states that communication is a tool to reduce one's

uncertainty, especially for people who do not know each other, so when uncertainty is reduced, an atmosphere conducive to developing interpersonal relationships will be created.

There are two types of uncertainty: cognitive uncertainty and behavioral uncertainty. Cognitive uncertainty refers to uncertainty about one's beliefs or attitudes. Meanwhile, behavioral uncertainty is related to how far we can predict behavior in certain situations (Febriani & Iqbal, 2015). West & Turner (2018) explain that uncertainty reduction theory also has basic assumptions including the following; a) When communicating interpersonally with people he does not know, a person experiences uncertainty, b) Uncertainty can trigger cognitive stress, because uncertainty is an unwelcome situation, c) When two people who do not know each other meet and have to engage in a conversation, then they will start to predict or estimate of information from the other person, d) Interpersonal communication is a situation that can develop rapidly through stages, e) The primary tool to reduce the level of uncertainty is interpersonal communication, f) an essential element in the development of interpersonal relationships is the amount and nature of information that is constantly changing and can increase and the initial interaction in the communication relationship is also a very important element, g) We can guess at someone's behavior with people who have the same character and also the same lifestyle.

People use tactics from three categories to reduce uncertainty: passive, active, and interactive strategies. The essence of each strategy is to acquire information. First is the passive strategy, where an individual acts as an unobtrusive observer. The second strategy is active, which is when the observer makes some type of effort other than direct contact to find out about the other person. For example, one might ask a third person for information about the other party. Finally, the interactive strategy occurs when the observer and the other person engage in direct or face-to-face contact by initiating a conversation that may include self-disclosure, asking questions, and other information-seeking tactics. Interpersonal communication is the most frequently used form in passive, active, and interactive interactions.

The assumptions in the Uncertainty Reduction Theory proposed by Berger and Calabrese are: a) High uncertainty in the early stages of communication encourages increased verbal communication between people who do not know each other, so that uncertainty decreases, b) Nonverbal expression of affiliation, which is a factor in the process of reducing uncertainty in the form of eye contact, gestures and other nonverbal expressions that if more nonverbal communication is expressed, the uncertainty will decrease, c) Information search, high uncertainty increases information search activities, d) Intimacy, The level of closeness of the information content in the conversation will increase if the uncertainty is low, e) Giving and receiving the same message is a form of low uncertainty about a person, f) Similarity, the similarity that exists between individuals who interact will reduce uncertainty and vice versa because increasing dissimilarity will increase alternative explanations for one's behavior as well, g) Liking, the higher uncertainty in one's mind will reduce the level of liking for others (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

## **Material and Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative method to determine the uncertainty experienced by parents in using Teman Kecil Day Care services, as well as the strategies undertaken to reduce this uncertainty. Researchers used case studies as an approach to exploring qualitative data. A case study is an empirical knowledge search process to investigate and examine real-life phenomena (Yin, 2009). Azwar (2015) states that more intensive and in-depth case study research aims to obtain a complete picture of the subject under study with the scope of research covering the whole life or only certain aspects. The subjects of this study are parents who use Teman Kecil Day Care services to share childcare roles. At the same time, the object of research is the uncertainty experienced by parents.

## **Result and Discussion**

Teman Kecil Day Care was established in early 2023 and managed by a couple of friends with a background and experience in child education for more than 15 years. Teman Kecil is present amid the increasing needs of the community in daycare. The daycare, located in a residential complex in Kota Bekasi, aims to share the role of childcare for working parents by educating, protecting, caring for, and providing stimulus for early childhood development.

As a daycare center, Teman Kecil has criteria for caregivers who will play a role in childcare daily. One of the main ones is to love the world of children and have experience in early childhood care

and education. Meanwhile, in accepting foster children, Teman Kecil has yet to have specific criteria because it considers that all children have the right to get supervision from adults and get stimuli by their age stages. However, ensuring the child is healthy when coming to the daycare is only necessary.

Teman Kecil is a newcomer in the daycare business. During the first few months, the manager tried to build trust and convince parents who would leave their children. The manager mentioned that the concern that arises at the beginning of the meeting is a natural thing to experience for both parties, especially parents. It is caused by several factors, one of which is that parents do not know the caregiver who will care for their children while they are left at work. As recognized by the manager of Teman Kecil, it is not uncommon for some nasty cases of daycare to also be a factor of concern that affects parents' perceptions of caregivers and daycare.

One of the causes of uncertainty is a person's ignorance about matters relating to people he has just met and the new situation, both culturally and personally. Therefore, he must interact and communicate interpersonally with people he has just met. Then, as more information is obtained, uncertainty will be reduced so interactions can run better.

Interpersonal communication generally involves two people communicating with each other who already know or have never known each other. However, for people who have just met and then engaged in conversation, there is a tendency for uncertainty to arise. As stated by Berger in (Griffin, 2012), this is that "the beginnings of personal relationships are fraught with uncertainties."

Based on interviews with several parents who use Teman Kecil Day Care services, the researcher experienced various uncertainties at the beginning of the meeting with the daycare manager and caregiver. The concerns are generally about whether the caregivers can be trusted to take good care of their children and provide food, supervision, and activities appropriate for the child's age. The anxiety and worry experienced by parents is a form of cognitive uncertainty because they have their own beliefs about what is imagined about these situations and conditions.

Parents also experience the influence of perception on interpersonal communication. Parents admitted to getting daycare information only from the internet and stories of experience from colleagues/relatives. The limited information about the situation and conditions in daycare gives them a vague picture of everything the caregiver will do with their children while being entrusted. These parents have never had childcare experience, and everyday care has a different program. It makes them able to predict only how the situation will be when their children are cared for by caregivers at Teman Kecil Day Care based on their respective perceptions.

Uncertainty will increase when someone is dealing with a stranger. There are many perceptions or negative and positive thoughts about the stranger. Even so, one party can see or learn the non-verbal behaviors expressed by the party they want to communicate with. One of the informants stated that the initial direct interaction with the prospective caregiver influenced her decision to choose the daycare. In addition to communicating verbally, expressions displayed in nonverbal form also affect their confidence.

*"Besides talking directly with the nanny, I also looked at her appearance when I first met her. It can be seen, whether the person is clean or not, then if she talks is there any eye contact or not and from the body language when greeting and introducing herself, I can also predict she is friendly or not"*

(Informant, September 06, 2023)

It is in line with previous research that proves the second axiom in Uncertainty Theory Reduction theory: when nonverbal expressions of affiliation increase, the level of uncertainty will decrease in the initial interaction situation (Firmansyah et al., 2019). These nonverbal expressions of affiliation can be in the form of expressions, eye contact, body language, appearance, etc.

Uncertainty is a condition that can cause people to feel uncomfortable. Therefore, they will be encouraged to try to reduce this uncertainty. Interpersonal communication is the right tool to reduce this uncertainty until mutual understanding is created. In an effort to reduce the discomfort parents feel over uncertainty, they make several efforts. Parents claimed they tried to find information to reduce uncertainty when they leave their children in Teman Kecil. Parents commonly seek information about the daycare location, parenting patterns, costs that must be incurred, facilities provided, timetable for the child, and so on. Parents gather this information through their colleagues with experience using

daycare services and search for information through social media. Some parents also admit to reading reviews submitted by others through Google Reviews.

The efforts made are a form of active uncertainty reduction strategy. Because in finding the information needed, parents interact with something other than the Teman Kecil Day Care. They get information through people with experience and media that provide information about Teman Kecil. By obtaining some information about Teman Kecil, parents have begun to get an overview of the daycare situation before entrusting their children to it. This behavior aligns with previous research, which proves a positive relationship between uncertainty and information-seeking behavior (Firmansyah et al., 2019).

In addition to actively searching for information, parents also observe the caregivers at Teman Kecil. This observation is a strategy to reassure themselves and reduce their anxiety. One of the informants said:

*"When I went there, while asking the owner questions, I also paid attention to the caregiver who was taking care of the children playing in the yard, how she talked to the children, how she supervised the children."*

(Informant, September 08, 2023)

Through these observations, parents directly understand how the caregiver communicates and treats their foster children. For example, whether they like to joke or not, how they speak with children, and how the caregiver behaves towards them. This observation gives parents a clearer picture of how the caregiver will treat their children.

Another informant said that observations were also made through the Instagram page of the @temankecil account. In the account, the admin usually shares daily activities carried out by the children. Observations are made by seeing what activities are given to children through Instagram Story shared by the @temankecil admin. This observation gives the informant an overview of the children's activities provided by Teman Kecil's caregivers. Children are given physical activities for their motoric needs and various sensory activities helpful in building their cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional skills.

The owner of Teman Kecil Day Care confirmed that they are active on Instagram daily to provide information to the child's parents about the child's activities on that day. Posts that contain children's faces also need to get approval from parents before being posted to the @temankecil Instagram Story. If the parents are unwilling, the admin will report the child's activity via WhatsApp. In addition to getting a live report on children's activities, parents will also get a daily report that will be given when parents pick up their children. The daily report contains information about the child's meal on the day out, information about the child's nap time, and the results of the child's activities on that day.

Not only done by parents but caregivers of Teman Kecil Day Care also make observations. Usually, when parents visit to conduct a survey, the child can play and recognize the daycare environment. That is when the caregiver can observe the child's behavior. The manager admitted that each child has a different way of adapting to their new environment. It is also inseparable from communication and parenting patterns at home. For this reason, observing how parents communicate with children and their behavior while playing is also very helpful for caregivers to approach to help children adapt to their new environment.

Observations made by parents and caregivers are a form of passive uncertainty reduction strategy. Although it takes place in one direction, these observations can provide an overview of the situation and character of the Teman Kecil Day Care environment, especially the caregivers of their foster children. It makes parents and caregivers adjust to each other and then start direct interaction.

After gathering various information and making observations, parents already know the prospective caregivers who will help them in their parenting role. Furthermore, direct interaction is a strategy carried out to reduce uncertainty. Direct interaction is an interactive strategy where parents interact with caregivers face-to-face so that they can easily see the characteristics of their interlocutors and get an accurate picture of the information and observations that have been made previously. Because people communicate to adapt to their environment (Suryanto, 2015)

In this interactive strategy, parents and caregivers engage in direct communication. It happens when parents visit Teman Kecil Day Care to conduct a survey. Parents try to explore what information is needed. The general information that is usually asked is how many caregivers there are, how many children have been registered, how the security system in the daycare environment, how the timetable is for children, and so on. In this interaction, parents try to get a clearer picture by completing the information they already have.

Interpersonal communication between parents and prospective caregivers is recognized as changing perception. Initially, parents thought that daycare was a worrying place with unguaranteed care. However, with the communication that was built and the increasing information, parents became convinced that Teman Kecil Day Care was a good choice so that they could still work without having to put aside childcare needs. It indicates that good communication will change a person's perception and form good future relationships. The caregiver also conveyed that the trust and comfort of parents are among the factors that help children adapt to a new environment quickly. Therefore, communication established at the initial meeting with parents and prospective foster children is essential for the sustainability of the next relationship.

Communication built at the beginning of the meeting continues to align with the growing confidence and trust of parents to entrust their children at Teman Kecil Day Care. The interactions that occur are felt more comfortable between parents and caregivers and caregivers and their foster children.

## Conclusions

The uncertainty experienced by parents in dealing with daycare caregivers is cognitive. Parents need clarification about the situation that will be faced when entrusting their children to Teman Kecil Day Care. Cognitive uncertainty is generally in the form of concerns about daycare parenting, the food caregivers provide, supervision, and stimulation activities provided to children. It occurs due to two factors. First, parents need to meet to know each other with the caregiver who will care for their child while left at work. Second, parents need to gain experience in using daycare services. So that parents have a vague picture of the situation.

The strategies carried out by parents in the process of reducing uncertainty are active, passive strategies, and interactive strategies. Active strategies include looking for information about Teman Kecil Day Care through other sources such as Social Media and Instagram, reading Google Reviews, and asking colleagues who have experience using Day Care services. The second is a passive strategy where parents make observations of caregivers during their visit to Teman Kecil Day Care. Parents try to observe how the caregiver treats their foster child and how the caregiver communicates with the child. Through this observation, parents get a clearer picture of the situation they will face when leaving their children with the Teman Kecil Day Care caregiver. The third strategy is an interactive strategy, which is when parents communicate dialogically with caregivers. Parents interact directly with caregivers to get any information needed. When this interaction occurs, parents can easily see the caregiver's characteristics. Not only verbal communication but also the nonverbal expressions displayed are factors that influence parents' judgment.

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