

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

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ABSTRACT

Many people these days are questioning whether students and young working professionals should live alone or with roommates, and if one decides to live with a roommate, how do they find the compatible one? And on this subject, there are differing viewpoints. In order to address the same, the present study was undertaken. The aim of the present study is to explore the factors determining compatibility among roommates/flatmates and examine the degree to which roommate/flatmate compatibility is an essential factor in co-living. For this purpose, a total sample of 35 participants (20 students and 15 working professionals) were selected across India who lived with a roommate/flatmate within the year 2018-2020 for at least 3 months. Data were collected through telephonic interviews & were thematically analyzed. Various themes emerged which suggested that if individuals don't have any shared ties, they feel the need for a facilitator as an app or a service that can help them find compatible roommates/flatmates. Future implications of the study have also been discussed.

Keywords: *Cohabitation, College Students, Compatibility, Flatmates, Interpersonal Relationship, Personality Measures, Roommates, Shared Housing, Working Professionals, Co-living, Platonic Compatibility*

When social milieus experience large changes, Haeffel & Hames (2014) expected that cognitive vulnerability will be subject to change during major life transitions (e.g., moving to college). They specifically looked at the possibility that a contagion effect could alter cognitive vulnerability. They used a prospective longitudinal strategy to test this theory on a sample of randomly chosen college freshmen roommate couples (103 pairs). The findings confirmed the hypotheses. Randomly assigned participants were more likely to "catch" their roommate's cognitive style and increase their own levels of cognitive vulnerability than other participants.

People in partnerships are said to become emotionally similar over time, according to Anderson, Keltner, and John (2003). This emotional similarity is supposed to assist couples better understand one another, coordinate their thoughts and behaviours, and promote social

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Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

cohesion. The authors discovered that over the course of a year, dating partners (Study 1) and college roommates (Studies 2 and 3) were increasingly similar in their emotional reactions using laboratory procedures to generate and analyse emotional response. Therefore, relationship partners with less power contributed more to the transformation required for convergence. According to the benefits of emotional similarity as proposed, partnerships with more emotionally compatible couples were more stable and less likely to end.

Housemate disputes are frequent and can be harmful to students' wellbeing (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley II, & Whalen, 2005; Erb et al., 2014). Students frequently hesitate or are unable to persuade their housemates to remain quiet since noise is a problem, especially noise from music or parties (Dusselier et al., 2005; Foulkes, McMillan, & Gregory, 2019; Walsh, Taylor, & Brennick, 2018). Although only one empirical study (of American college roommates) has specifically noted this, fights about cleaning are prevalent according to anecdotal evidence (Keup, 2007). Conflict is likely to emerge since each student brings habits and behaviours from their home life into the new environment because they are all living independently for the first time (Holton, 2016). When these routines and actions conflict with those of other students, some renegotiation or behaviour modification may be requested or necessary, which can cause conflict and tension (Holton, 2016).

In a long-term study, 228 college students were evaluated to determine the relative and combined impacts of perceived social support and social conflict on psychological distress. There were no gender differences in the level of psychological discomfort or perceived social support from friends or roommates, although women reported feeling more socially supported by their friends and roommates and having less conflict with them than did males. Increases in psychological distress were predicted by roommate conflict, but this effect was mitigated by high levels of perceived social support from peers. The presence of high levels of perceived social support from roommates mitigated the influence of friend conflict in predicting increases in psychological discomfort over time. These findings highlight the significance of both positive and negative social experiences for emotional functioning as well as the value of compensatory social support for people.

In a bigger survey of 138 students from a major east coast university, raters evaluated students' ability to communicate with their roommates based on their written responses to four hypothetical circumstances (Waldo, 1984). Positive communication between roommates among students was substantially linked to improved overall psychological adjustment (Waldo, 1984).

In a subsequent follow-up study of 127 of these participants, positive roommate communication skills, as well as self-report of higher quality relationships with roommates, were each significantly associated with higher GPA and with greater retention, as indicated by their registration the following semester (Waldo, 1986). Of note, the design and data analysis techniques in these early studies did not account for any interdependence that may exist between roommate's communication skills or their adjustment by explicitly recruiting roommate pairs and treating them as dyads in analyses. However, taken together, the results of these studies do demonstrate an important association between the quality of roommate relationships and students' psychological and academic functioning.

Stronger proof that living with a roommate is protective of a college student's mental health comes from a more recent, broader, and methodologically complicated research of college

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

housemates. A supportive roommate relationship can have a cross-domain buffering effect of social support, which is when social support within one area of social functioning lowers the negative consequences of social issues in another domain, according to Lepore's (1992) research of 228 college students. In this study, even after controlling for the effects of baseline psychological distress, high levels of social support from roommates (2 weeks after they moved in together) moderated the association between conflict in general friendships (also assessed 2 weeks after move-in) and psychological distress (7 weeks later) (Lepore, 1992). Particularly, the association weakened with increased roommate support. This study showed that roommate relationships have the potential to serve as a significant protective factor for students' mental health in the face of stressors in other areas of interpersonal functioning, even though participants lived with their roommates in off-campus apartments, which may have been a little different from traditional on-campus roommate living situations (e.g., voluntarily choosing their roommates).

In the same vein, data suggests that a bad roommate relationship may increase the risk of mental health issues and poor college adjustment. Having frequent arguments with one's roommate was found to be a major predictor of students' overall stress level in recent research of 462 college students at a Midwestern university who lived in residence halls (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005). Open-ended replies from students who elaborated on their roommate dispute usually included references to how bothersome they found their housemates' activities, such as staying up late and waking them up (Dusselier et al., 2005).

Furthermore, having a bad roommate relationship was significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety, lower life satisfaction, poorer academic adjustment to college, poorer social functioning in college, and less attachment to college in a recent study of 127 students residing on campus at a large east coast university (Erb & Short, 2012).

These same results as well as students' depression were substantially correlated with higher amounts of perceived criticism from roommates (Erb & Short, 2012). Furthermore, in the same sample, dysfunctional roommate relationships mediated the link between stress and depression in women, making the correlation greater as more dysfunctional roommate relationships were perceived to be (Machell, Erb, Kleiman, & Short, 2012). (Note that the moderation only trended towards significance when both genders were considered in the analysis; the small number of males [$n = 39$] precluded formal statistical investigation of a gender difference in this moderation.)

These studies collectively offer compelling evidence that a bad roommate relationship can be harmful to college students. This idea is supported by the regular publication of articles about residence life-related topics in research journals affiliated with the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), which also demonstrates the significance that people working in Student Affairs attach to elements like dorm roommates. For instance, interactions with roommates are frequently brought up as a source of stress in qualitative studies of how students from different populations adjust to college (e.g., Bradbury & Mather, 2009).

Significance of Compatible Room/flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

In pursuit of better prospects, an increasing number of young adults are leaving their homes which not only allows them to form new friendships and experience life away from home but also face daily hassles in adjusting to novel surroundings such as paying their bills and

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

most importantly finding like-minded company. Other things include exorbitant rent, dealing with landlords who are still hesitant to rent to bachelors, awkward living atmosphere, uneasy room/flatmate's company, hesitancy in living alone, etc. These issues thus put forth the shared housing as a viable option for those having difficulty renting a flat in a new city.

Furthermore, paying guest (PG) accommodations, mansions, and serviced apartments, often provide an affordable choice for young people searching for adequate and safe lodging in large cities which are not only near to their educational institutes but are also affordable for many individuals.

Who is a room/flatmate?

A college roommate isn't simply someone with whom you share only a refrigerator or roof - they may significantly influence an individual's academic performance, both physical and mental health, and social attitudes. And it's of no surprise, given that students spend more time with their roommates than with their friends each week. This conjuncture can help one conclude that interpersonal bonds are crucial for millions of college students' psychological as well as social growth.

Winerman and Swanson (1952) studied the friendship formations in students in the dormitories and found that the highest proportion of friendships occurred among students who lived in rooms that were adjacent to each other.

We often see that most renters are assigned roommates randomly and have no control over which they share a room or flat with. Setting two total strangers to be roommates might have two plausible outcomes. One, being trapped together as roommates may pave the way to a pleasant connection and genuine companionship. Second, being paired with someone incompatible with oneself, on the contrary, may cause discontentment and tension. It may also result in disinterest. This is also empirically known to significantly affect students' well-being and academic performance, especially while they are adjusting to a new educational setting (Lessard & Juvonen, 2018).

Research suggests that peer interactions influence students' feelings of belonging and affiliation with their institutions (Strayhorn, 2012). These accommodations are the epicenter of student involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) since university students spend a significant amount of time there. These accommodations have the potential to provide an environment that may help students flourish both academically and socially.

Regardless of one's career choice, living in close quarters with another person is a typical sight. Whether roommates have a lengthy history together or are selected to live together at random, there is always the possibility that they will get along or that their relationship will not go as smoothly as they would want.

Because of how significant this issue may be to an individual's achievement, it is crucial for a study to be conducted on this matter. While colleges and universities are increasingly perceived as companies rather than educational institutions, a considerable population of higher education professionals is working to create learning environments on college campuses. It is critical for all students who choose to live on campus that their roommate relationships support this goal. Relationships between roommates have been the most significant influence on students' college experiences (Stern, Powers, Dhaene, Dix, &

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

Shegog, 2007). Students' displeasure with their housemates has been linked to poorer retention rates and GPAs and wrong impressions of their total university experience (Stern et al., 2007). This helps to show the importance and the need to shine a light on the lesser talked topic of roommate relationships.

Roommates at college are an idea that has been around for a long time now. This companionship isn't a completely novel idea. Moreover, it has flourished since its inception and expanded beyond college students to include working professionals in India (Garber-Paul, 2014). Over two decades ago, a study discovered that people with comparable personalities might have the edge over people with distinct attributes (Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991).

Co-Living Trends in India

India has one of the world's largest millennial populations, between 22 and 38 years. As projected in many reports, their number in India is around 426 million, or 34% of the entire Indian population. Of this 426 million, 68% of millennials, or 299 million individuals, live in leased housing. (Sharma, 2022)

This population is more mobile, and it is constantly relocating from smaller towns\ villages to larger cities in search of education and job opportunities. With this growing millennial population, there has been a drastic increase in the demand for various rental housing in most Indian cities. Among the varied rental spaces available, the community spaces such as paying guest (PG) lodging, hostels, and shared apartments are most commonly chosen by the youth today.

Moreover, individuals looking for accommodation are usually randomly placed in dorm rooms with individuals they have never met before. These haphazardly created connections might turn into solid friendships, adversarial partnerships, or have a variety of shades of apathy in between, further affecting their mental health. Nevertheless, all these create another hassle for a person to deal with every day.

Co-living is thus becoming a need rather than a choice, thanks to its appeal among the younger generation! Besides providing renters with a home-like setting, co-living is the formalization or institutionalization of the conventional shared housing options. With such a large global workforce and student population, today's youth is constantly traveling and relocating, thereby seeking ways to save money wherever possible. These co-living spaces' rents include all additional amenities while remaining inexpensive for the average young worker. (Sachitanand, 2022) Such facilities of co-living places, attracts much of the population towards it.

Co-living places are gaining popularity, not just among college/university students but also among frequent travellers and individuals who migrate from their hometowns for work or education. The rise in the co-living culture is primarily because they provide tailored experiences instead of the hotels that merely offer boarding and loading facilities. Moving out of a city may be a challenging endeavour, but it becomes considerably more difficult when looking for a property to rent. (Sachitanand, 2022)

The college years are a crucial stage in one's growth. Several prominent psychologists have stressed the significance of social functioning throughout these years. According to Erikson's (1968) stage theory of psychosocial development, young adults' primary goal is to

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

feel the closeness in relationships rather than isolation. One of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of psychosocial developmental challenges that college students encounter is cultivating mature interpersonal interactions. Also, late adolescence is a pivotal time in a young person's development of identity, relationships, and future professional prospects (Young, Marshall & Murray, 2016). Finally, traditional-aged college students are part of Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood stage, marked by long-term identity building.

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives

The present study has been carried out to explore the factors determining compatibility among roommate/flatmates and to examine the degree to which roommate/flatmate compatibility is an important factor in co-living.

Participants

The interviews were conducted on 35 participants (males-16 & females-19) falling in the age range of 19 to 28 years. These interview candidates were gathered via the Snowball Sampling technique (wherein, already known individual with a roommate was asked to identify other potential candidates). The interview was conducted with individuals from different Indian states, mainly Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi NCR, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand over normal voice call. Before beginning, every participant was informed that the interview shall last upto 15-30 minutes and not more than that. With their consent, the interview began and they were given the opportunity to add any other relevant details, stop wherever they felt the need to be and the provision to interrupt and clarify any queries from the interviewer.

The sample comprised of either workforce millennial or students, which establishes the fact that their purpose of movement was either pursuing education or job opportunity. It was also ensured that the participants lived with a roommate/flatmate for at least 3 months within the year 2018-2022.

Measures

In order to study the factors determining compatibility among roommates/flatmates & increasing need for compatibility, a set of 20 questions (excluding demographic details) were asked from each participant. The language of communication was English as both, the interviewer and the interviewee, mutually agreed on it and was comfortable with it rather than other local languages.

The entire structure of the interview is presented in Appendix A. Here are the designed initial questions for rapport formation & making participants comfortable. For instance-

- What is your name?
- What is your age?
- What is your place of birth?
- Where do you live currently?
- Are you working or studying?
- What are your most used applications?
- What is the average screen time?
- How many times have you moved cities?

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

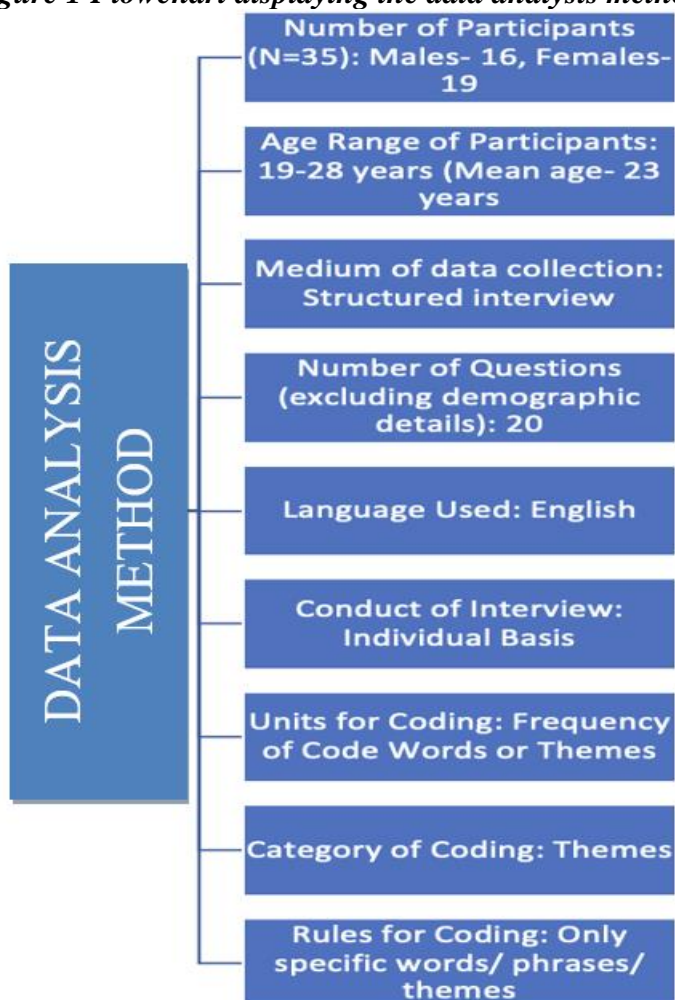
Procedure

With an aim to explore the factors determining compatibility among roommates/flatmates and get an in-depth view of the increasing need for compatibility among co-livers, this particular study was administered to a vast array of young students and working individuals. A qualitative approach using structured interviews was adopted to gather data. These interviews were recorded on cell phones via regular voice calls. Each interview was later transcribed via the help of a web domain, "SONIX.AI." Sonix is an online transcription platform. It is a fast, accurate, and affordable platform which upon uploading a file, automatically transcribes, translates, and helps to organize audio and video files in over 40 languages.

Data were collected from participants who lived with a roommate/flatmate or searched for a roommate/flatmate within the year 2018-2022. Consent was taken from each participant before recording their interviews on phone & they were assured that data will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

Interviews were then transcribed using 'SONIX.AI'. Once the automated transcripts were ready, they were reviewed and manually edited at places per requirement. This data cleaning process helped us get 35 well-responsive interviews out of the 39 conducted ones. 4 interview recordings were ruled out because of its unclear audio quality and incomprehensible nature. Further, thematic analysis was undertaken to interpret the data.

Figure 1 Flowchart displaying the data analysis method used for the present study



RESULT & DISCUSSION

The interviews provided with rich inputs. The main inputs extracted from it are discussed in this section.

Table 1 A few of the questions and themes analysed from the interviews

QUESTIONS	THEMES
University/college hostel system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roommates are allocated randomly without considering similarity in lifestyle & personality type. • After connecting with compatible people students generally shift from hostels to flats.
Factors important while looking for flat/room in a city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOCATION- proximity to college or workplace. • ACCESSIBILITY- to market, hospital, transportation & dining area. • QUALITY OF SERVICE- safety, cleanliness.
Search for room/flatmate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friend circles. • Facebook groups.
Factors helped in connecting with flat/roommate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar interests. • Already knew each other. • Regional & cultural affiliation. • Friendships. • Compatibility.
Top concerns while looking for flatmate/roommate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should have similar interests. • Should have similar lifestyle like cleanliness, hygiene etc. • Should have similar personality characteristics. • Should be open to adjustments.
Problems faced while looking for room/flatmate	<p>Yes- 39.1% (new to city, have no connections) No- 60.8% (since had friends & knew people)</p>
Verified profile of roommate/flatmate	<p>Important- 82.8% Not-important- 17.1%</p>
Willing to provide own Aadhaar Card's details	<p>Yes- 78.1% No- 12.5% Depends on authenticity of platform- 9.37%</p>
Other than Aadhaar details	<p>E-mail Phone number</p>
Purpose of roommate/flatmate	<p>Yes- 53.5%</p>

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

QUESTIONS	THEMES
moving should be same	No- 46.6%
Number of flatmate/roommate willing to live with	Maximum- 3 Minimum- 1
Important to get in touch with person about to live with	Yes- 82.1% No- 17.8%
Not getting beforehand information about the person one is going to live with is bothersome	Yes- 73% No- 27% (if option of changing roommate due to incompatibility given to college/university students, it would be very helpful).
1st impression of roommate maintained throughout the co-living tenure	Yes- 85.7% No- 14.28%
Willing to use an app that connects one with a compatible roommate/flatmate	Yes- 86.9% No- 13.1%
Pros of living with a roommate/flatmate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split bills • Ensure safety • Leisure Bonding • Academic help • Help in household chores • If compatible, get along
Cons of living with a roommate/flatmate	None- 28% Others- Compatibility issues and Lifestyle differences like drinking, smoking, sleeping schedule.

Note. Aadhaar card is an identification document issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) after it records and verifies every resident Indian citizen's details including biometric and demographic data.

Through the interviews, we found that 75% of participants indicated they wanted to live with a roommate/flatmate as it helps in numerous ways. Few common advantages mentioned by all included splitting bills, having a companion to engage in leisure activities, and getting a more significant amount of help in household chores, and academics. Safety is also ensured by a company rather than staying alone.

On the other hand, only 25% of participants indicated that they wanted to live alone for the first time since they did not know anyone and were unsure whether they would be compatible with the strangers. A handful in this percentage also said the only reason for choosing to stay alone was to experience living a life and managing everything on their own terms.

Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

51.4% of participants said that they would give more preference to a flatmate/roommate over a flat, i.e., they are more concerned about the people they are going to live with rather than the place of stay. The reason for the same was because it is easier to find a place to stay as there are various platforms available (e.g., Google Search, MagicBricks, brokers, etc.), but it is hard to find a roommate to stay with who is compatible, has similar lifestyle & personality characteristics, since there is no efficiency or validity in online groups of roommates present on Facebook, Telegram or other sites.

With the thematic analysis done, it was seen that 82% of participants indicated that it will be helpful to have 'beforehand' information about the room/flatmate they will live with in the future. While on contrary, 17.9% suggested that no prior information about the roommate is a necessity.

Our analyses, (upon questioning about hostel life, this fact was common for most interviews), suggest that participants living in a hostel ultimately shifted to a flat with their friends in successive academic years as they were not compatible with their current roommate. In contrast, in hostels, they don't have the option of selecting roommates of their preference which was worrisome for them. Hostel authorities randomly allocate the roommates, irrespective of their lifestyle & personality differences, which later create adjustment issues, ultimately affecting the well-being of students and hampering academic achievements too.

The interview ended with a question about willingness to use an app or any similar service to find a compatible roommate. The analyses of this answer brought to light that that 86.9% of participants are 'willing to use an app that connects one with a compatible roommate/flatmate' pertaining to the items of lifestyle habits and personality traits.

Viewing all these analysed points together, it can be established that there is a need and significant impact of having a compatible roommate/flatmate in the lives of today's youth. With its pros and cons, a companion with mutual platonic feelings is an efficient necessity for a healthy co-habitation.

CONCLUSION

Keeping the above themes in mind, one can conclude that compatibility is crucial nowadays. People are already in a mode of significant transition in their life, and having difficulty adjusting and other lifestyle issues would be just another factor to roll on daily hassles. The problem of compatible roommates/flatmates has been encountered & acknowledged by individuals shifting to new cities to work & study. Nobody wants to live with a stranger, even in hostels or paying guest accommodations, due to adjustment issues caused by differences in lifestyle & personality characteristics.

People who move to different cities for education or work look for mutual connections. But if they don't have any shared links, they feel the necessity of an app or service which could connect them to compatible roommates/flatmates; as many participants also said- we are seeking 'tinder for roommates/flatmates'.

Moreover, many previously established studies also stand as an effective testimony for the need for a compatible platonic relationship and how it influences one's life.

Limitations of the current study and Future Directive

As evident from the sample of this study, its restricted nature is the foremost limitation of this study. Culture specific distinctions are also not well recognized anywhere in the study. The focus on just one aspect which is the need for compatible room/flatmate kept us stuck at one point thereby neglecting any other prominent emerging themes. These aspects do not allow the paper to have a holistic approach. Another limitation is the use of a normal voice call which does not agree to the current digital time and can be easily replaced with a video call.

Any further research on this similar domain can keep these limitations in mind and work ahead.

Future Implications

Acknowledging the problem of roommate/flatmate compatibility & the need for a platform or service which connects compatible roommate/flatmate, “codee” (Delhi based private organization) is developing an app that pertains to the questions of lifestyle & personality, after which compatibility percentage is computed through machine learning and based on this percentage suitable and compatible roommate/flatmate pairs are suggested to the user.

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Significance of Compatible Room/Flatmate: A Qualitative Thematic Study

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Conflict of Interest

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