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The Effect of Newer Communication Technologies on Relationship Maintenance and Satisfaction in Long-Distance Dating Relationships

By Allie Kirk

With the rapidly changing technological environment, long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) are transforming. At one point in time, long-distance relationships consisted primarily of handwritten letters with the occasional phone call in between. However, progression and advancements in technology have led to numerous means of communication via the Internet, creating a new and unexpected dynamic in the realm of romantic and long-distance communication. With more than 800 million active users, according to their website, Facebook is quickly becoming a dominant source of communication. In addition, Skype has also allowed for a type of “face-to-face” contact, even miles away. While there is extensive research on LDDRs and the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the college environment, the use of Facebook and Skype by partners in LDDRs has not been thoroughly examined.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand how these newer communication platforms play a role in long-distance dating relationships, particularly for college-aged adults. We divided communication channels into two separate categories: indirect and direct. These two categories align with the standard definitions of synchronous and asynchronous channels as stated by Li, Zhang, and Zhao (2005). From here, we examined the use of such channels and their association to both relational satisfaction and relational maintenance strategies, further expanding upon previous research on this topic.

Literature Review

Communication Channels

Researchers studying LDDRs have made a distinction between synchronous and asynchronous

communication channels. According to Li et al. (2005), synchronous channels are those in which “the message sender and message receiver are present at the same time, and immediate feedback is possible,” whereas asynchronous channels lack immediacy, resulting in delayed feedback (p. 1). Therefore, in this study we label synchronous communication channels as “direct” communication channels, which include Skype or Facebook chat, given the ability for both sender and receiver to immediately respond. We define “indirect” communication channels as those that fall under asynchronous communication, such as e-mail or the general use of Facebook or Twitter, where information is absorbed and communicated at the receiver’s own pace. Previously, email was considered direct CMC. However, we categorize it as indirect since these newer technologies have emerged that allow for even more immediate communication.

Past research shows that, overall, CMC is heavily used in long-distance relationships and, in particular, direct CMC. Li et al. (2005) conducted a study focusing on the amount of direct communication channels used in long-distance relationships, and found no significant results that the amount of direct CMC related to communication satisfaction, but that an individual’s choice of platform played a role in the matter. However, Chang (2003) found that partners in long-distance relationships viewed technology as a positive influence in their relationships. Similarly, Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, and Wigley (2008) conducted a study on the use of e-mail in varying types of both long-distance and geographically close relationships and found that e-mail was used most when involving a romantic partner. Thus, research so far has concluded that CMC use positively affects LDDRs, with email as the most preferred medium. In support of this, Utz (2007) concluded that as couples became more comfortable with CMC, they preferred email to the telephone. Recently though, CMC has evolved in such a way that email is no longer the most efficient form of CMC.

With the addition of Facebook and Skype, studies should now take into consideration these new platforms of CMC and how partners in LDDRs use

them. According to Steinfield and Lampe (2009), participants used Facebook for the purpose of maintaining relationships, rather than initiating new ones. Now that Facebook has become a prominent means for maintaining relationships, we question whether or not email would still be the most preferred platform for partners in LDDRs. Thus, we propose the first research question:

RQ1: Which of four computer-mediated channels of communication (Facebook, Skype, email, Twitter) are most frequently used as a means of communication in long-distance dating relationships today?

Relational Satisfaction

There are numerous factors that can add to or detract from the quality of a dating relationship, and the factor of distance can play a major role. Long-distance dating relationships in college tend to have varying levels of stress, resulting in differing levels of relational satisfaction (Maguire & Kinney, 2010). Spott and Pyle (2010) define relational satisfaction as “what an individual actually experiences and what he or she expects to experience” from the other person (p. 31). Due to the nature of LDDRs and the limited amount of communication, relational satisfaction relies greatly on CMC. In a study on self-disclosure in long-distance friendships, Andersen and Wang (2005) found that, although partners self-disclosed more face-to-face, relationship quality was positively correlated with CMC self-disclosure.

Relational satisfaction is also dependent on which communication channels are most frequently used in long-distance communication. Dainton & Aylor (2002) concluded that the use of telephone and Internet were positively correlated to relational satisfaction in LDDRs. However, this study only examined the idea of direct channel use versus indirect by comparing telephone and Internet. Thus, by expanding this research to include the use of newer channels such as Facebook, Twitter, or Skype, we predict that:

H1: Couples who spend more time using newer computer-mediated communication in a long

distance dating relationship are more likely to have a higher sense of relational satisfaction.

This study also considers the effects of indirect communication alone on relational satisfaction, as Facebook and Twitter have created a new environment for dating relationships. However, while overall use of CMC may increase relational satisfaction, we question what Facebook and Twitter alone do, without direct CMC as a component. The ability to observe and absorb information about one’s partner could potentially create tension and distrust, should the direct CMC component be lacking. We therefore propose the second research question:

RQ2: Does indirect computer-mediated communication create a lower sense of relational satisfaction in LDDRs?

Relational Maintenance

Relational maintenance strategies are also crucial factors in communication patterns between partners in LDDRs. According to Bryant (2009), relational maintenance strategies are defined as symbolic behaviors that communicate the desire to continue on with a relationship. The five strategies are as follows: positivity, openness, assurances, social networks, and tasks (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Rabby (2007) conducted a study examining the differences between relationship maintenance in CMC versus face-to-face communication. He found that long-distance dating relationships show high usage of positivity and openness from CMC. Wright (2004) concluded in his study that the use of maintenance strategies in CMC positively related to communication satisfaction. In addition, Bryant (2009) found that users of Facebook employ relational maintenance strategies via the site. Taken together, it is clear from previous studies that CMC use promotes the use of relational maintenance strategies; however, we seek to examine the factor of frequency of CMC use as well. Thus, we pose our second hypothesis:

H2: There is a direct relationship between frequency of CMC use and the use of relationship maintenance strategies in long distance dating relationships.

Method

Participants

Twenty undergraduate students (85% female, 15% male) from a small, private university in Southern California completed a questionnaire about attitudes and communication patterns in long-distance dating relationships. In order to meet the needs of the study, participants were asked to confirm that they were involved in a long-distance dating relationship.

Measures

A thirty-five item questionnaire was sent out via email and Facebook to prospective participants. The questionnaire included three sections, each addressing a different aspect of LDDRs.

Relational Satisfaction. Relational satisfaction was assessed through a 7-item 5-point Likert scale, developed by Hendrick (1988). Questions prompted participants to rank satisfaction 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well/very much) through items such as “How well does your partner meet your needs?” and “How much do you love your partner?”.

Relational Maintenance. Relational maintenance strategies were assessed through Stafford and Canary’s (1992) revised relational maintenance scale. This section of the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, which assessed the maintenance strategies of positivity, assurance, or openness. Participants were asked to rank the degree to which they perceived each item described their methods of maintaining the relationship on a 1 (hardly at all) to 5 (very frequently) Likert format, with items such as “simply tell him/her how I feel about our relationship” and “show myself to be faithful to him/her.”

Communication Channel Use. Use of computer-mediated technology was assessed through questions that asked participants to mark how many hours per week each channel was used as a means of communication between partners. In addition, participants were asked to rank the order of channel most frequently used (5) to least frequently used (1). The questionnaire concluded with demographic measures of age and gender.

Results

Our first research question asked which of the four computer-mediated channels of communication

(Facebook, Skype, email, Twitter) are most frequently used as a means of communication in LDDRs today. Based on the data in our sample, 50% of participants ranked Skype as most frequently used, and 30% of participants ranked Facebook chat as the second most frequently used channel. 80% of participants ranked Twitter as least frequently used.

Our first hypothesis stated that couples who spend more time using newer CMC in a LDDR are more likely to have a higher sense of relational satisfaction. The correlation between time spent on Skype and relational satisfaction is $r = .28$. Thus, our hypothesis is supported for Skype since .28 is positive. The correlation for both time spent on Facebook chat and Facebook browsing and relational satisfaction is $r = -.15$. Therefore, our hypothesis is not supported for either Facebook chat or Facebook browsing since -.15 is negative. All responses for time spent on Twitter were the same, thus yielding no correlation and no support for the hypothesis.

The second research question asked if indirect CMC creates a lower sense of relational satisfaction in LDDRs. The relational satisfaction mean for participants who ranked Twitter as 1 and 2 for frequency of use is 4.37, and the mean average of relational satisfaction for participants who ranked Twitter as 3-5 is 4.86. Thus, our hypothesis is not supported with Twitter since the relational satisfaction average of those who reported using Twitter more frequently is higher than those who reported using it less. The relational satisfaction mean for participants who ranked Facebook browsing as 1 and 2 is 4.68, and the relational satisfaction mean for participants who ranked Facebook browsing as 3-5 is 4.30. Thus, our hypothesis is supported with Facebook browsing since the relational satisfaction mean of those who reported using Facebook browsing more frequently is lower than those who reported using it less. The hypothesis is not supported for email because the relational satisfaction mean for participants who reported 1 and 2 for email is 4.34, and the mean for those who ranked email as 3-5 is 4.49.

Our second hypothesis stated that there is a direct relationship between frequency of CMC use and the

use of relationship maintenance strategies in LDDRs. Based on the data in our sample, the correlation between the overall mean average of time spent using CMC and the relational maintenance mean averages is $r = .37$. Thus, our hypothesis is supported because $.37$ is positive.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the ways in which newer technologies affect LDDRs, particularly relational satisfaction and maintenance strategies. While the scales for both relational satisfaction and relationship maintenance strategies had been previously constructed, our questionnaire was designed to find the relationship between those variables and time spent using CMC in a LDDR. Overall, Skype was the only new CMC channel that yielded supportive results for our research questions and hypothesis. Based on our findings, Skype was the most preferred medium in LDDRs, where previous research had concluded that email was the preferred platform. Additionally, time spent using Skype was positively correlated to relational satisfaction, which could not be said of the other CMC platforms identified in this study.

However, the design and wording of our hypotheses, research questions, and questionnaire created more problems than we had foreseen. While our questionnaire correctly used the relational satisfaction and maintenance scales, our questions concerning time spent using CMC should have been asked differently. Had we used open-ended questions that allowed participants to report the exact number of hours spent using each platform on a weekly basis, we could have more effectively run correlations on our data. Since we utilized a multiple response method with responses that did not signify one exact value, we were unable to run correlations on some items, such as with Twitter. We also did not include a question that required participants to report overall time spent using CMC, thus forcing us to analyze the data on each platform individually, which did not exactly align with the wording of our hypotheses and research questions.

In addition, the sample used for this study was not representative, thus decreasing our external validity.

Since we selectively identified participants who fit our requirements, our results can only be generalized to those who match the exact demographics of our sample. Our sample was also predominantly female, so future research could examine differences of CMC use amongst males and females.

Based on our findings with Skype, future research should also further expand upon Skype specifically, examining the differences between face-to-face communication and cyber “face-to-face” communication and the implications of the latter. Future studies should also focus on the specific maintenance strategies individually, rather than as a whole, and how they are employed via newer technologies of Facebook, Skype, and Twitter.

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Persuasive Strategies and Hats Off for Cancer Donations

By Janae Masnovi

Introduction

What types of persuasive appeals are most effective in nonprofit advertising? This question has been investigated in various studies, and it continues to be an important point of interest. The *New York Times* estimates that people come in contact with advertisements 5,000 times a day (Story, 2007). Advertising is a process in which both the organization and the audience actively participate (Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, & Thaivanich, 2001). Many different appeals are used to gain compliance from the audience. Aristotle presented three persuasive techniques—path, logos, and ethos—that

play a significant role in changing audience beliefs. The first technique is pathos, Greek for “suffering” or “experience” (Henning, 1998). Pathos appeals to the audience’s emotions and identity. Logos, or “word,” uses logic and evidence to convince the audience (Henning, 1998). Finally, ethos establishes the good “character” and credibility of the author (Henning, 1998). These three appeals have been used for over 2,000 years due to their power to convince.

Choosing the right persuasive strategy is an intentional and essential practice for organizations. This is particularly an issue for nonprofits as they have an overt ethical responsibility to the public. The number of nonprofits is increasing rapidly. “Between 2001 and 2011, the number of nonprofits has increased 25 percent, to 1,574,674 million, and the growth rate of the nonprofit sector has surpassed the rate of both the business and government sectors” (Urban Institute, 2012). Although nonprofits have a different goal than most businesses, they too must advertise and fundraise to keep their organizations running. It is important for nonprofits to know which strategies are most effective in regards to their specific organizations as well as for consumers to recognize and respond to these appeals. The type of persuasive strategy used can affect both the behavior of the audience and the perception of the organization in the public.

In order for the audience to react, they must have both the ability and motivation to do something about the cause, and ability and motivation are affected by advertisements that include these persuasive strategies (Chandy et al., 2001). This study will explore the previous research on the effectiveness of persuasive strategies and produce original, applied research.

Literature Review

Considerable research has been conducted regarding the content on different forms of advertisements, and researchers have drawn various conclusions about the effectiveness of the identified persuasive techniques. First, pathos will be examined. According to Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia (2008), the effectiveness of an advertisement depends on who is portrayed as the beneficiary from the donation.