

A Systematic Literature Review on Interpersonal Communication Activities between Romantic Partners

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Abstract

(Introduction) This article investigates interpersonal communication activities among romantic partners. The existence of the Internet has changed the nature and way people communicate with each other. Romantic partners used to communicate face to face however have shifted their communication with the usage of the Internet. This is due to the convenient nature of the communication technology. Communication technology with the help of the Internet has offered plenty of communication platforms such as social media; WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok, to name a few. However, scholars suggest due to the dependency on communication technology, the face-to-face communication activities among romantic partners have decreased. Thus, the main questions addressed are: what are the interpersonal communication activities among romantic partners? What are the mediums used by romantic partners to communicate with each other? Are they more dependent on communication technology in facilitating their interactions? (Methods) To answer these questions, a systematic literature review is conducted. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), which involves four steps which are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion- were used as the guideline to conduct the systematic literature review. (Results) Results reveal several themes. Romantic partners use communication technology such as Facebook, WhatsApp's to facilitate their daily routine due to i) cheap cost ii) fast iii) complement face to face communication. (Discussion) In the conclusion, future directions are discussed.

Keywords

interpersonal communication activities; communication technology; romantic partners.

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Introduction

Interpersonal communication is a particularly important part of humans' lives. Interpersonal communication refers to communication that takes place between two people (Hanson, 2008) influenced by communication messages from each other through face-to-face interaction (DeVito, 2010) and other various medium such as technologies (Zhou, 2016; DeVito, 2005). Interpersonal communication helps people to conveyed messages and reaches mutual understanding and agreement and allow them to coordinate goals. Through interpersonal communication, people are able to establish relationships with others, such as friendships and romantic relationships in creating strong, deep, and close association. This association may be based on solidarity, love, business, or other types of social commitment that can be categorized into six stages namely are contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, repair, and dissolution (Devito, 1993). However, with today's technology advancement, the orthodox interpersonal communication has evolved. Most of the world has shifted their face-to-face interpersonal communication to electronic communication (DeVito, 2008) which is the Internet. Communication technologies have helped to developed relationships, relationship assistance and enhancement (Hertein & Anchet, 2014). Furthermore, communication technology frequently being used due to its convenience, easy and cost-effective. Despite the expediency of communication technology in moderating interpersonal communication, however, there are also the adverse effects of using it, whereby one of the prominent adverse effects is the lack of non-verbal cues that might jeopardize the quality of online communication occurred. The crucial component of effective communication, such as immediate feedback is lacking in virtual communication (Henderson, 2010) thus affecting the quality of communication. Internet not only change the dynamic of interpersonal communication, but it is quality as well because it is altering the way people communicate with each other. Aforementioned, communication technologies have transformed communication into social dialogue, dominates and reshapes society and culture. Due to the advancement of this technology, the world is more connected, and the implications towards interpersonal relationships are inevitable. Thus, the need to recognize the role played by these virtual platforms and technology in interpersonal interaction is crucial. The constant progress of technology advancement had led some believe that people around the world are becoming more connected while others deem it may isolate and divide them. Anyhow, technologies, have alter human interaction and relationships, society, and environment. A great deal of work has been carried out to study the influence of communication technologies on interpersonal communication on various types of relationships, such as adolescent friendship (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Gapsiso & Wilson, 2015; Ndunge, 2017), teacher-student relationships (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007; Alsalem, 2018; Keasberry, 2018) and family members (Mesch, 2006; Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018; Ngonidzashe, 2016; Pace et al., 2015). However, there any areas that need more exploration to examine how the communication technologies have altered communication and relationships. As stated before, communication technologies have impacts relationships. Not to mentioned, the existence is also said can significantly impact romantic relationships. Abundant of literatures have suggested the usage of communication technologies not only change the communication activities within romantic relationships but might altered the outcomes and direction of the relationship as well. Coyne et al (2013) mentioned, married couples use communication technologies to facilitate and maintained the relationship. They also added married couples' consumptions of communication technologies is higher than dating couples as the married couple use communication technologies as additional medium of communication to run and coordinate their daily routines with the spouses. Thus, the effect of communication technologies may be prominent in marriage compared to other dyadic relationships. In Malaysia context, communication technologies have been widely used since the first penetration of the Internet in the county in 1990s. In 2018, 27.8 million users used the Internet in Malaysia (Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commissions, 2019). The Internet has become a vital medium to have social engagement. The most common Internet user activities include email communication and social network visits, with 96.5 % and 85.6% respectively. The most popular and used social networking sites among Malaysian are WhatsApp and Facebook. Malaysians spend nine hours per week on average on Facebook, which is the highest compared to other countries (New Strait Times, 2011). A survey conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported

that around 24.6 million social media users existed in 2018; 97.3% of them owned a Facebook account, 57 % owned Instagram account, 48.3% owned YouTube, 31.3% owned Google+, 23.8% owned Twitter (23.8%) and LinkedIn (13.3%). However, due to the heavy consumption and reliability on communication technologies in daily lives, it led to the adverse effects whenever the usage is violated. Researchers often mentioned communication technologies such as social media can be double-barreled to any relationships as they mentioned such technologies can serve either positive or negative outcomes to the relationships. Under those circumstances, social media has been addressed as one of the contributors to divorce cases.

Interpersonal communication medium

McLuhan (1967) claim "medium is the message". The medium is crucial in an interaction as it can shape and determines the kind of message. McLuhan added in order to study the change in society, it is crucial to understand the medium itself rather than the message. Face to face communication and computer mediated communication (CMC) possessed several prominent differences in how the communication is translated (Rackets, 2020). They added the differences are related to how the information is translated, encode and decode by the sender and receiver and the pace of the message transmitted. Those differences might change the dynamics, complexity, and the outcome of the communication. Thus, it is importance to investigate communication and the dynamics of the moderns' day communication. In this research, the moderns' communication and how it changes relationship dynamic between marriage couple will be investigated. The Internet has become a powerful medium of communication (Matusitz, 2007). In 1991, Tim Berner Lee successfully connected hypertext with the Internet and formed a new type of networked communication called the World Wide Web. Features such as email, weblogs have helped the emergence of online communities and facilitate offline communication within these groups. In the early stage, networked media only allow users to join or build a group. Users cannot interact with each other within the groups. However, with the advancement of Web 2.0, starting in the millennial era, interaction among each other is possible whereby the technology introduced two ways and more interactive communication online. Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 in order to describe the utilization of the World Wide Web by the software developer and end-users; whereby an individual no longer publishes the application and content but continuously modified by several users collaboratively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, the Internet is also called new media. According to Lister et al. (2009), new media can be characterized into four criteria. There are digitality, convergence, interactivity, hyper textuality and virtual. Digitality refers to the dematerialization of text. Convergence means the convergence of forms, media, computing, electronic communication, and information. Interactivity refers to the freedom to produce content and information during the interaction. Hyper textuality involves the transformation of cultural patterns, styles of interaction, economic activities. Virtual refers to the formation of virtual communities beyond boundaries that will change the traditional interaction and perceived reality. As a consequence, the Internet has a significant effect on the quality of human interaction (Sochiano, 1999). Internet has changed human communication (Shim, 2007). Not only it affects the communication quality, but it also affects the desire to communicate face to face. Shim has done a study to investigate Internet usage among teenagers. The study found that the more teenagers interact using the Internet, the less their desire to talk and communicate with family members and friends. This study synchronizes with findings by Gapsiso & Wilson (2015), whereby the usage of the Internet has reduced face to face communication with friends because when they spend more on the Internet, they hardly spend time interacting with their family members. This parallel with Kraut et al. (1998), people who use social media will develop feelings of loneliness and less engage in interpersonal interaction. Social networking sites provide a false sense of connection and led to loneliness (Johannah, 2009). To illustrates, displacement theory is used in a study done by Shim (2007) in explaining the relationship between Internet usage and interpersonal interaction. Same as the hydraulic model, time displacement theory states that time spends on one activity, will decrease the time spent on other activities. The study proved time displacement theory, whereby, Internet use has a significant negative correlation with face-to-face communication with family members. In other words, people who spent more time online will communicate less with family members. Not only Internet effect time spent communicating with family members, but it also affects the desire to communicate face to face. In the same manner, the usage of technology can also be a threat to a relationship as it can lead to message

misinformation, social comparison, and infidelity (Akanle et al., 2020). Zhang et al. (2019) have revealed a significant positive relationship between mobile technology penetration and the divorce rate in China, hence, providing empirical data pertaining to technology usage and marriage dissolution. On the contrary, Hamza (2014) stated there is a positive relationship between social media usage and interpersonal communication. This study discovers that social media has facilitated communication and thus, cultivate more communication and interaction, especially with friends. Social media, such as WhatsApp has helped increase interaction in relationships. Social media has increased social intimacy and desire to communicate face to face in a relationship (Si, 2012). This is due to the convenience nature of social media. However, the affect of the social media towards relationship is still an open debate among the scholars. Notably, social media can be classified into different types. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), there are six types of social media which are collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social network sites, virtual game world, and the virtual social world. Collaborative projects refer to social media is the most reflection on User Generated Content (UGC) idea whereby the content is continuously and collaboratively created and added many multiple end-users. These websites allow the users to add, change and delete text-based content. The idea of collaborative project websites is to allow the content to edit my multiple end-users so that the final content will be better outcomes as the content is created by multiple users with many ideas and knowledge instead of just one user. An example of collaborative project websites is Wikipedia. With all the existence of social media and communication technologies aid, this paper attempt to discover the types of communication medium used by romantic partners in facilitating their relationship.

Methodology

This paper opted on a systematic review approach. The database chosen for this study is Scopus. Scopus is chosen due to the prominence leading indexed database with over 75 million records from 5000 publishers across the world. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), which involves four steps which are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion- was used as the guideline to conduct the systematic literature review. PRISMA is a published standard that commonly used to conduct a systematic literature review.

Identification

The first stage for a systematic review is the identification conducted in March 2021. The process involved keyword identification in searching the database. The keywords are derived from the help of dictionaries, synonyms, thesaurus, keywords from previous literature reviews and possible related terms from word social media. The result of 711 documents was retrieved from this process.

Table 1:

Keywords in identification process

SCOPUS keywords	TITLE-ABS-KEY (((("interpersonal communication activities" OR "communication activities" OR social media OR mobile phone OR Facebook OR Instagram OR Tiktok OR face to face) AND (partner* OR intimate OR marriage OR couple*))) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
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Screening

This stage refers to the inclusion and exclusion of the articles based on predetermined criteria. The three predetermined criteria are timeline, document types and language. In this study, data to be reviewed were retrieved from the year 2020 until 2021. Data that not within that stated year, were excluded from being review. The reasoning of the period is due to the author's interest and intention to study the interpersonal communication phenomenon for the recent years. The second inclusion criteria are the document types. For this study, article journals were selected. Other types of documents such as books, chapters in book, proceedings and conference papers were

excluded. The reasoning for the exclusion is the author only intended to review primary sources—the last criteria language. Only English language journals were selected to be reviewed. Non-English language journals were excluded to eliminate translation errors and difficulties to review. After this process, out of 711 journals that been screened, total numbers of 91 remains.

Table 2:
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	Between 2020 and 2021	Other than stated years
Document types	Research journal articles	Books, chapters in books, proceeding and conference papers
Language	English	Non-English

Eligibility (Manual screening)

Eligibility is the process whereby the author manually included or exclude the journals based on specific criteria. The author excluded journals that not related to the objective- interpersonal communication activities among intimate partners. A total number of 91 journals were checked for eligibility, and 8 have remained after the process end.

Analysis

The analysis of the systematic review is guided by the research question formed. The remaining journals, after the process of screening and eligibility, were analyzed. In this stage, qualitative appraise of quality is implemented. The process requires researcher to weight the study by placing studies into high, medium, and low categories (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The low-quality studies can be used to supplement, but not as the foundational literature. Hence, out of 8 journals from previous process, 2 journals were excluded as the journals are not related to the main objective, which is the interpersonal communication activities in intimate relationships. All the remaining 6 journals were synthesized. According to Robinson & Lowe (2015) in systematic review, often the final analysis of the paper is fewer than 10 papers. The journals were analyzed, and themes and subthemes were extracted. In order to identify the themes, researcher conduct as thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is to extract data and statement that responds to the research question. Then, researcher developed meaningful group through coding techniques.

Findings

The summary of the findings from reviewed journals are presented in Table 1 as below. From 6 of the journals, only one research conducted qualitative methodology while the remaining 5 research conducted quantitative methodology in data collection.

Table 1:
Summary of findings

Researchers/year	Findings
Himawan et al, 2021	Use internet to communicate and recreational purposes.
Jinnai et al, 2020	Humanlike communication media can affect the development of the relationship.
Cumming & Reimer, 2020	The usage of cell phone to have conversation can lead to higher conversation satisfaction compared to the usage of cell phone as incidental use.
Arikewuyo et al, 2020	Partners mostly use social media such as Facebook and Snapchat to communicate with each other. However, high usage of social media lead to adverse effect to the relationship.
Walsh et al, 2020	The usage of social media cultivates self-disclosure.
Nayar & Koul, 2020	The usage of social media can lead to greater relationship satisfaction mediated by self-disclosure and trust.

Discussions

Based on the reviewed journals, partners in intimate relationship utilize both face to face communication and other communication media to facilitate their interaction. However, Arikewuyo et al (2020) highlighted that partner rely more on technology communication mediated media to communicate. Social media has helped to facilitate face to face communication, whereby it helps partners to communicate even more (Vaterlaus & Tulane, 2019). Whenever the members cannot have face to face interaction due to some obstacle such as physical proximity constraint, they will utilize technology to communicate and maintain family relationships. Most of the journals, highlighted that the medium use to communicate with each other can lead to different affect in the relationship depending on the frequency of the usage. Walsh et al (2020) mentioned that the usage of social media can cultivate self-disclosure. This aligned with research by Langat (2016) which reveals social media leads poor self-disclosure, detrimental interpersonal communication that will eventually lead to poor interpersonal relationships. Arikewuyo et al (2020) also mentioned that the high frequency of social media can lead the adverse effects to the relationship such as poor relationship satisfaction, relationship monitoring and relationship commitment. This aligned with previous research by Iqbal & Jami (2019), social media has now become one of the tools for online surveillance. Spouses invest time to stalking and spying their partner's online activities. This act is called interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES). Online surveillance is encouraged due to a large amount of information on social media and the nature of anonymity access. Lack of trust and inappropriate content by the spouses are the significant factors that were causing adverse outcomes to the relationship. Not only that, Abassi (2018) revealed that there is a relationship between the number of social media account and relationship commitment. Partners with more than two social media accounts possessed less level of relationship commitment compared to the partner who possessed only one social media account.

Conclusions

The literature reviews have revealed several findings of interpersonal communication activities in intimate relationships. In nutshell, partners use both face to face and other medium of communication such as cell phone and social media to interact with each other. However, several outcomes of the usage can affect the relationship in terms of satisfaction, commitments, and self-disclosures. The limitation of this research includes the number of years (only 2020 and 2021) included in the journal's selection. Future research might include longer years to be included in the journal's selection to gather more rich findings. Other than that, a qualitative method can be adopted in future research in order to discover more depth in communication activities among romantic partners.

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