(i-COME'20)
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA 2020

SOCIAL MEDIA: CONTRIBUTORS TO RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION?

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Abstract

Technology advancement is imminent and has changed the society landscape. Communication technology has aided in shaping and altering the way people communicate. The Internet has helped the emergence of social media whereby the usage is beyond communicating with someone we know. The features such as creating a profile, sharing content, meeting strangers and more; has led it to be one of the most visited and consumed sites on the Internet. There are many effects of social media; the effect on a relationship is one of it especially in romantic relationship. Some of the effects of social media in romantic relationships includes jealousy, online surveillance, sexting, self-disclosure, sexual function, relationship commitment, convenience, and infidelity. Due to the negative effects of social media on romantic relationship, it might lead to relationship dissolution. Mentioned adverse effects can contributes to lower relationship satisfaction. With lower relationship satisfaction, couples might decide to get out of the relationship; as based on social exchange theory, people tend to weigh the relationship from economic perspectives whereby if the cost outweigh the reward, tendency of the outcome to be negative is quite high. This paper is a conceptual paper, attempting to investigate the relationship of social media consumption, relationship satisfaction and relationship dissolution.

Keywords: Relationship satisfaction, relationship dissolution, Social Media

1. Introduction

Social media has transformed communication into social dialogue, dominates and reshapes society and culture. To date, social media sites are the Internet's most visited sites, and that number keep growing every day (Gull et al., 2019; Mustafa & Hamzah, 2011; Qualman, 2009). Due to the advancement of this technology, the world is more connected, and the implications towards interpersonal relationships are inevitable. Thus, to recognize the role played by these virtual platforms and technology in interpersonal interaction is crucial. The constant progress of technology and social media 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, and social media sites would alter human interaction and relationships, society, and environment. Because of this, a great deal of work was carried out to study the influence of social media on interpersonal communication on various types of relationships, such as adolescent friendship (Gapsiso & Wilson, 2015; Lenhart et al., 2007; Ndunge, 2017; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), teacher-student relationships (Alsaleem, 2018; Keasberry, 2018; Mazer et al., 2007) and family members (Mesch, 2006; Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2019; Ngonidzashe, 2016; Pace et al., 2013). In addition, social media can also significantly impact intimate relationships. The impact of social media on romantic relationships is vital for understanding the use of social networks and how romantic relationships have changed. However, the importance and role of social media in marriages and family context is still poorly understood (Akanle et al., 2020).

2. Problem Statement

Based on statistics from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), 50, 356 divorce cases were reported from 2018, with an average of three married couples files a divorce in one hour. Social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp was mentioned contributed to the breakdown of a marriage. Under those circumstances, social media has been addressed as one of the contributors to divorce cases. Addiction to social media is one of the top ten reasons for divorce in Malaysia (Harian Metro, 2019). According to Syariah Chief Justice of Terengganu, Facebook, and WhatsApp usage are amongst the factors that lead to misunderstanding in relationships and resulting to divorce (Harian Metro, 2018). The Director-General Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) mentioned; the advancement of technology and social media has led to neglection of responsibilities. It is due to addiction to online games, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, to name a few, which eventually led to more poor communication and conflict in marriage. Psychologist and Dean of Education Faculty of University Malaya, Prof. Madya Dr. Mariani Mohd Nor mentioned apps such as WhatsApp being a platform for the young married couple to express their anger when dealing with marriage conflict (Harian Metro, 2019).

In addition, social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp have said contributed to marriage breakdown. A study done by Lumpkin (2012) discovered that 33% of divorce cases mentioned Facebook as one of the contributors as it led to inappropriate messages to the opposite sex. This notion aligns with the study by Whitty (2003), also discovered that partners' online investigations would often lead to the discovery of online infidelity activities. To explain this phenomenon, previous literature often uses the social exchange theory whereby the theory proposes cost and rewards as the determinants of the

outcome. In this case, social media can be seen as both cost and rewards. This research intends to understand whether the use of social media in a romantic relationship is regarded as a cost or reward. If the usage deemed as the cost to the relationship, will it contribute to low relationship satisfaction and led to relationship dissolution? This study will expand the theory by providing evidence of the cost and rewards attributes of social media usage in romantic relationships.

3. Literature Review

Social media is a platform that allows people to interact with other people more conveniently. With the advancement of technologies such as Web 2.0 has cultivated the creation of features on social media such as content sharing, profile update, videos, community sharing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) Social media can be seen as one of the contributors of relationship outcomes such as relationship commitment (Anderson & Emmer-Sommers, 2006; De Lenne et al., 2019), infidelity (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017a), breakup (Garimella et al., 2014) and marital quality (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Anyhow, social media can be considered as a threat to a romantic relationship.

According to Boon and Holmes (1991), a romantic relationship can be developed in three stages, namely romantic love, evaluation stage and accommodative stage. In the first stage, trust, and love can be differentiated. In this stage, the couple is still in love and disregard the trust issues. In the second stage, which is the evaluation stage, the trust started to build-up. In this stage, the couple starts to be more open, and self-disclosure is crucial to build the trust between couples. The last stage is the accommodative stage, whereby the couple established the trust for their partner. Boon and Holmes (1991) stages illustrate the recent phenomenon whereby partners that involved in relationships less than 5 years has more tendency to break up and more affected with technology (Coyne et al., 2011) compared to partners in a relationship more than 5 years (Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013). This is due to the lack of trust in the relationship at an early stage.

Eichenberg et al. (2017) have suggested the pros and cons of communication technology to an intimate relationship. The pros include allowing partners to stay communicate all day, help to manage and communicating relationship problems and help to improve partners' intimacy. However, the cons include cyber infidelity, cybersex addiction and online jealousy. A study done by Iqbal & Jami has discovered that female-heavy Facebook users have less trust towards their spouses as their online surveillance had led to a higher level of jealousy and directly impact marital satisfaction. Social media can trigger jealousy between spouses (Abbasi & Dibble, 2019; Daspe et al., 2018; González-Rivera and Hernández-Gato, 2019). This is due to the online surveillance activities by the spouses that will eventually create jealousy. Distrust between the spouses also contributes to the jealousy with their loved one social media activity. This notion aligned with the study done by Tandoc et al. (2015), who revealed heavy social media users would have a higher tendency of feeling envy and showed a higher level of depression symptoms. Social media has triggered a sense of uncertainty, thus, leading to online monitoring. In a study done by Muise et al. (2009) has found the relationship between jealousy and Facebook surveillance. The partner who spends more time on social media has a high tendency to experience jealousy due to the ambiguous information they obtain on social media.

3.1. Commitment

By taking time away from partners, social media can affect the quality of romantic relationships (Abbasi, 2018). This notion has been explained by the theory of time-displacement, by which people will spend fewer time on one task while they participate in other activities. In this case, people who spend more time online will spend less time with their partners. Hence, affecting their relationship commitment. Abbasi (2018) has provided empirical results showing dependence on social media related to low relationship commitments. They also exposed individual with a significant number of social media accounts will also have low relationship commitment. Research by Drussell (2012) opted social exchange theory in conceptualizing measurement of commitment in relationships. Social Exchange Theory views human interaction and relationships in economic terms whereby peoples' behaviours are based on the outcomes. This theory mentioned that people would calculate the overall relationship in terms of costs and rewards (Stafford et al., 2008) by subtracting the cost from the rewards they gained in the relationship; mentioning social media as the cost and can be one of the factors that led to divorce. Communicating on Facebook can lead to marital conflicts (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017b). Due to the tendency to interact with the opposite sex on social media and might lead to infidelity. Social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp have said contributed to marriage breakdown. Lumpkin (2012) discovered that 33% of divorce cases mentioned Facebook as one of the contributors as it led to inappropriate messages to the opposite sex. This aligns with the study by Whitty (2003), which also discovered that partners' online investigations would often lead to the discovery of online infidelity activities. Similarly, as mentioned by Storey & McDonald (2014), social media can harm romantic relationship by being a platform to cultivate potential harmful communication with alternative partners that will lead to conflicts or relationship dissolution.

This parallel to study done by Arifa et al. (2017) who concludes that Internet can decrease environmental pressure when encountered during face to face communication. Interaction on social media gives users time to review and rethink the messages before passing it on. However, online communication tends led to misunderstanding because the recipients cannot understand the emotion behind the messages sent. Social media has altered the traditional interaction due to the absence of face to face and led to lacking communication skills such as nonverbal communication such as body language (Thompson, 2011). Shakiratul Rahman (2014), has proved that people with high addiction to social media will weaken their communication skills.

3.2. Relationship satisfaction

Satisfaction is one of the dominant aspects of relationships, such as marriage and divorce in the literature. Link satisfaction is commonly regarded as the final common mechanism leasing to deterioration of relationships. Fincham & Beach (2009) defined the measurement of relationship satisfaction can be categorized into behaviour, emotion, and cognitive aspects. Relationship satisfaction is the gold standard for evaluating measures intended to alleviate distress from relationships. Relationship satisfaction can be defined as feelings of content and satisfaction of a person towards the relationships they involved. Yoo et al. (2014) suggested that relationship satisfaction is associated with sexual and

emotional intimacy. A study done by Rusbult & Buunk (1993) has discovered that satisfaction has a positive relationship with the level of intimacy and commitment. A high level of relationship satisfaction is the result of a high level of intimacy and commitment. Anderson et al. (2012) have outlined six predictors of relationship satisfaction in the online relationship, which are similarity, commitment, intimacy, trust, attributional confidence, and communication satisfaction.

There are two approaches to conceptualizing relationship satisfaction, namely intrapersonal and interpersonal approaches (Fincham & Beach (2009). The interpersonal approach usually looks at interaction patterns such as contact, partnership and conflict and appears to encourage the use of words such as adjustment. In contrast, intrapersonal more focus on individual assessments, namely, subjective relations evaluation.

Rockinson-Szpakiw et al. (2015) have explained the term sound marital house as the frames from marital satisfaction and quality. There are four concepts, namely marital friendship, positive sentiment override (PSO), regulating conflicts and creating shared symbolic meaning. Marital friendship refers to positive behaviour while interacting with a partner, while PSO is referring to the behaviour of constructive acceptance rather than critical or negative. Conflict regulation includes implanting good skills while navigating relationship conflict occurred. While symbolic meaning reflects, couples are sharing symbols and experiences to cultivate positive marital interactions. All these four concepts required one specific skill which is a good communication skill and quality communication to encourage the concepts to occurred so that sound marital house can be achieved.

In the context of social media, it can affect the intimate relationship in terms of their sexual relationship. It is happened due to exposure to sexual content online. Sexual content can significantly affect the level of commitments in marriage (Olmstead et al., 2016). This notion is supported by research done by Alimoradi et al. (2019) that discovered social media addiction is negatively affected sexual dysfunction among females. Social media addiction not only affects female sexual desire but men as well. A study done by Muusses et al. (2015) has shown that social media addiction on sexual content has a reverse association with sexual satisfaction among men. Furthermore, 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). Such behaviours will lead to jealousy and further to marital dissatisfaction. A study done by Iqbal & Jami (2019) has pointed out that the time spent on Facebook does not significantly affect marital satisfaction, but the activities done on Facebook does.

Furthermore, the Internet has changed human communication (Shim, 2010). Not only it affects the quantity of communication but its quality as well. According to Funk and Rogge (2007), the quality of communication in a marriage can be considered as a salient predictor of marital outcomes. Moreover, Lavner et al. (2016) have suggested that quality communication is not only the predictor of relationship satisfaction but its vice versa relationship, whereby satisfaction predicts communication is investigated. The research revealed that poor communication leads to changes in satisfaction and can cause damaging impacts on relationships (Byers, 2005).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social media usage and relationship outcomes, specifically relationship commitment and relationship satisfaction. This study also attempts to investigate whether social media consumption related to relationship dissolution. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between all the mentioned variables. Based on the literature reviews discussed above, researcher three hypotheses were built for this research as follow:

Hypothesis 1: *Heavy social media usage positively related to low relationship commitment.*

Hypothesis 2: *Heavy social media usage positively related to low relationship satisfaction.*

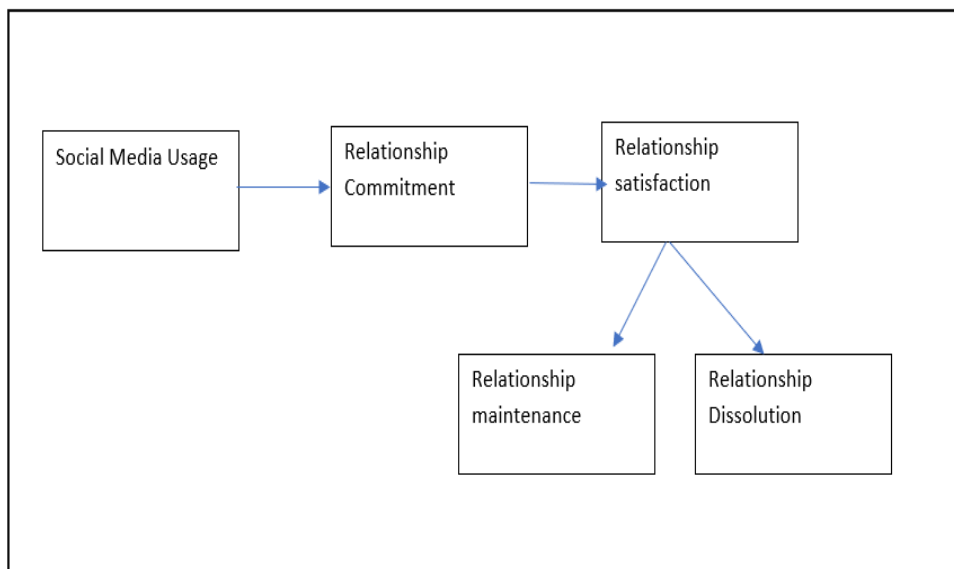**Hypothesis 3:** *Low Relationship satisfaction will lead to relationship dissolution.*

Figure 1. Conceptualization framework of the research.

5. Conclusion

This paper is a conceptual paper reviewing literature on social media consumption and relationship dissolution in romantic relationships. Based on the aforementioned literatures, social media consumptions among romantic partners can led to lower relationships commitment as the activities done on the social media can be considered as negative and harmful and be regarded as the cost of the relationship. Not only that, negative activities and heavy consumption of social media can also lead to lower relationship satisfaction. As partners viewed social media as cost of the relationship, thus, lowered the relationship commitment and satisfaction; hence it will potentially be led to the relationship deterioration and dissolution.

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