Exploring Interpersonal Communication for Maintaining Long Distance Romantic Relationships (LDRR)

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Abstract

Long-distance relationships (LDR) are increasingly common, particularly among young adults. The geographic separation inherent in LDR, and communication factors, may have implications for the satisfaction relationship of individuals in LDR. However, little current work examines these potential associations on decision communication. The current study examined associations between relationship-level predictors (satisfaction, maintenance) and individual-communication disclosure in LDDRs. In the present study, all participants live in Gorontalo City (Indonesia) and their couple lives in another city. Participants (N = 7) were young adults (22 - 35 years old), who completed an interview on communication relationships. Here, we report sample characteristics; correlations between key study variables; and, results of stepwise-whether relationship-level variables predicted individual-level disclosure. Results indicated that relationship satisfaction of romantically relationship happiness, commitment, and conflict did not differ based on LDR status, but, relationship stress led to in change couple’s communication behaviours. In conclusion, empathy, respect, support, and equality is the main aspect of interpersonal communication disclosure among the couple.

Keywords: LDRR, Young Adult, Self Disclosure, Interpersonal Communication
1. Introduction

Geographical differences with romantic partners identified as long-distance romantic relationships (LDRR) can occur for a variety of reasons, such as job requirements, education, and parental or family relocation obligations (Hammonds et al., 2020). Lacking the intimacy of face-to-face communication and contact causes these relationships to face more challenges in trust and disclosure (Gentina & Chen, 2019). With advancements in communication technologies such as social media, and video rooms, numerous LDRR now have access to mediated communication with their romantic partners. And much of the research has delved into the role of technology in LDRR relationships, which is a new challenge to the ability to read verbal and nonverbal cues, thereby creating less in-depth connectivity in LDRR relationships.

Recent studies have found that individuals in LDRR report lower levels of relational quality compared to geographically close couples (Andris & Lee, 2021). Particularly, stressors related to managing distance and uncertainty in LDRR studies showed higher levels of individual and indicate uncertainty surrounding their relationship as a significant contributor to this stress (Inciong et al., 2020). In Billedo et al., (2020), the result found that partners in an LDRR reported greater levels of relational uncertainty when it came to social media usage of their relational partners, reporting feelings of jealousy and engaging in surveillance behaviors. In addition, communication in relationships will also be influenced by a common attribute their has such as nature, nationality, race, and capability (Juniarti, 2021b). The results also showed that young women are more involved in problems with their partners than with their friends if they communicate remotely (Jensen & Rauer, 2016). Thus, uncertainty may have a significant effect on the communication that occurs in LDRR.

In short, a study on the comparative classification of communication formats as more or less meaningful in LDRR helps us understand the importance of the interpersonal communication process. To help manage uncertainty in an LDRR typically will solicit and engage in more disclosure (Juniarti, 2021a). Meng & Dai (2021) suggested relational partners must engage in updating and disclosing their current knowledge of themselves, their knowledge of their partner, and their attitudes—and feelings about the relationship and its future. Therefore, this research aims to update interpersonal communication behavior following ever-changing technology with complexity to the various formats used. The present study, also investigates what reasons are given for the assignment of meaningfulness to particular formats, allowing respondents to define meaningfulness in whatever way makes sense to them specific to LDRR type; the researchers posed the following research questions arose:

RQ1: How do couples self-disclosure and resolve conflicts arising in LDRR?

RQ2: How do couples communicate to reach decision making processes?

2. Previous Related Study

As noted earlier, self-disclosure is the most effective strategy for maintaining intimate relationships. When high levels of uncertainty are reported, individuals will typically solicit and engage in more in-depth disclosure, one possible explanation is a negative correlation between self-disclosure and tension and a positive correlation between self-disclosure and trust in LDRs. Hammonds et al (2020) study found that most participants felt as though the LDRR contributed directly to the uncertainty stress of their relationship. In line with it, Amelia (2020) study describe and identified that the open and honest communication of thoughts and feelings is an effective way to maintain romantic relationships.

Only a few studies have compared the costs and benefits of LDRR versus geographically close relationships. Beckmeyer et al (2021) studied a sample of married adults in LDRR and took measures on marriage satisfaction, how they maintained their relationship, stress in the relationship, and frequency of sexual encounters. They hypothesized that people facing separation from their loved ones have added stressors, such as increased money spent to visit the partner, as well as specific costs including less social support from the partner and time lost as a result of planning certain times to communicate (Bois et al, 2022). However, to the author's knowledge, no studies have tried to explore how couples communicate their decision based on their relationship type. The goal of the current study is to explore relationship-
3. Study Case Scope

Based on the above description, the analysis of such communications includes the media used and how they communicate. In addition, this study will also describe the couple’s efforts in caring for the relationship, the conflicts experienced, and the resolution of these conflicts by couples undergoing LDRR. The conflict relates to the interpersonal communication of the two individuals involved in the LDRR relationship. As quoted from DeVito’s statement, man’s goals are incompatible; if his goal is achieved, his partner’s goal is not. Conversely, if his partner’s goal is achieved, his goal is different (DeVito, 2016). The settlement generally involves communication between the two parties who establish the LDRR and use the help of technology rather than face-to-face talk to find a solution to the problem.

4. Data and Method

The data in this study was obtained by interviewing seven adolescents who underwent LDRR. One in Gorontalo City, while the other couple is in another city. The teenagers interviewed were in the age range of 14 to 19 years. The distances that separate them also vary. Of the seven young adults interviewed, two of them experienced LDRR with their lovers between Gorontalo City and Pohuwato Regency (approximately 151 km apart), two were separated between Gorontalo City and Palu City (approx. 605 km), one person separated between Gorontalo City and Minahasa Regency (approx. 306 km), and two more experienced LDRR with their lovers—satisfaction among LDRRs. In doing so it will help to fix the lack of literature examining long-distance relationships in a social exchange framework.

Tabel 1. Profile Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Distance to the couple’s place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>151 km (Pohuwato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>151 km (Pohuwato)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1,416 km (Makassar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TE</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,416 km (Makassar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PYA</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>306 km (Minahasa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TE</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>605 km (Palu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>EAR</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>605 km (Palu)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants completed an questionnaire that included the aforementioned demographic questions and Likert-type questions addressing (a) Attachment Style, (b) Self-Disclosure, (c) Relational Uncertainty, (d) Trust, and (e) Relational-
Satisfaction. Participants were asked to think about the relationship they currently have with their long-distance significant other to address the following measures.

Based on the results of interviews with the seven people, the media that are often used to communicate remotely are WhatsApp, line, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The most frequently used way of communicating is to send texts in the form of writing and photos as evidence of the activities being carried out by their partner. Another unique thing couples use in communicating with each other is sending stickers available within their respective platforms.

Communicating using stickers is one of the efforts to create positive impressions between communicants and communicators. Communicating with text in the form of writing and stickers, as well as images sent using the WhatsApp group platform, is an effort made by two individuals involved in romantic relationships. It is due to the sudden intensity of encounters greatly changing from usual when the two individuals decided to LDRR. Thus, the essence and things communicated in interpersonal communication between two individuals, namely lovers who are LDRR, also change. Individuals are forced to do LDRR to meet the demands of work and college.

For the interviewees in this study, communicating with their partners through digital platforms is the main key to maintaining their long-distance relationship. The advantage of the digital platform is not only the ease of sending messages in the form of text-shaped chats, but also the ease of sending images in the form of screenshots, images that-downloaded from Google and Safari search engines, and can send stickers describing their mood.

In the communication process that occurs between two individuals who establish LDRR, the communicator is the party who takes the initiative to initiate communication. Communicators also have needs that can be conveyed and met by communicants. The communicators in this study were dominated by men. This is also in line with a study conducted by (Putri & Hermawati (2022)) which states that men emphasize their expertise in dominating interactions with their partners. This is also justified by the sources of the initials DF and IT, where they are the most dominant in making decisions in dating.

Meanwhile, communicants are dominated by women. Although women have the initiative to send a chat first, messages replied to by men will trigger further conversations. These conversations are the main way to build harmonious relationships in long distance romantic relationships. The conversation, delivered by SS, DF, IT, and EAR speakers, was related to their daily lives in the field. As a couple working in the field, they often take time to make calls, video calls, and send text messages to keep each other in the loop. Meanwhile, other speakers tend to share stories about their respective hobbies, because their close relationship to dating begins with an approach that discusses hobbies. Conversation is also the bridge between communicants and communicators to give each other affection and inclusion to meet human needs, namely the need about love and affection (Stoyanov, 2017).

When the interviewees communicate with each

![Figure 2. Research findings on Long Distance Romantic Relationships (LDRR)](image-url)
other, they can tell each other's stories, so that the element of disclosure to the couple begins to appear. That disclosure triggers the trust that arises from each other, so that the already intertwined people will last longer. For SS, IT, and EAR who have been in a relationship for more than two years and are separated from their partners, the main factor in maintaining a relationship is disclosure so that it can give birth to trust. Meanwhile, according to other sources, there are several factors that influence the perpetuation of their relationship, namely empathy, support, mutual respect, and equality. These factors also give birth to trust, thus having an impact on the lasting relationship between the interviewees and their partners.

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Disclosure is meant honesty in telling about anything, from public information to private stories. The words conveyed are also unambiguous, so there is no misperception when individuals are separated by distance and only establish communication through digital media. Disclosure, according to all sources, can foster empathy, support, mutual respect, and equality between the resource person and their partner. The interviewees interpreted empathy as the sensitive feelings of their partners towards themselves and vice versa. One of the speakers, DF, said four have important values for the sustainability of their relationship with their partner. For him, DF’s relationship with his partner is difficult to continue if no one is aware of the feelings, interests, desires and difficulties that each party’s person faces.

Support is a form of individual concern for their partner. The same goes for couples involved in LDRR relationships. TE said that support is important in TE's relationship with her partner. That support is so important when TE faces problems in its workplace. In addition, according to TE, the support of the couple when TE's actions make decisions is also important in establishing and maintaining the relationship.

Respect is also an element that makes individuals endure with their partners. EAR said mutual respect occurs when they argue with each other. For EAR, his partner always listens and respects his choices.
Meanwhile, the SS said that mutual respect also-happened to him and his partner. When SS took decisions that differed from the principles of her spouse, its spouse chose to respect the decision of the SS. That keeps the SS and their partners afloat even though they are in a situation that necessitates undergoing LDRR.

The last element needed to establish a long-standing relationship in LDRR is equality. Such equality is not only about gender equality but also related to principles. The principle relates to the differences between male and female parties, but the principle is acceptable to differ from each other. All the speakers stated that mutual acceptance of principles and nothing dominates in emphasizing the principles in the LDRR relationship. The disadvantage of this digital communication is limitations between one couple and another who is separated from the city. For example, a PYA source who has a mate in Minahasa said that losing the signal in Minahasa during the rain made PYA and her partner involved in the conflict. PYA finds it difficult to contact via phone or chat, so PYA suspects that her partner deliberately turned off her phone. Even with EAR, who has a partner in Palu City. Palu City is one of the cities affected by an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale. If the partner's cell phone is difficult to contact, EAR will immediately search for news about Palu and contact the partner's friends. EAR does not feel jealous, but he puts more worry in his heart because his lover was a victim of an earthquake in Palu in 2018. This suggests that digitally limited communication does not resolve a conflict experienced by the four couples but helps to communicate the conflict. Thus, digital communication must still be carried out (Tania & Nurudin, 2021).

From the description above about the relationship between individuals who experience LDRR, several things can be implemented with the theory of self-disclosure, where the theory is closely related to interpersonal communication. DeVito (2022) writes that individuals create and build interpersonal relationships. In interpersonal relationships, there are several relationships: the relationship seen by the communicator, the relationship seen by the communicant, and the relationship desired by both parties. When discussing interpersonal communication in the LDRR case, the desired relationship is seen from -any view, the male side, the relationship on the female side, and the relationship desired by both.

Self-disclosure is also used in couples that perform LDRR. Self-disclosure is a type of communication that contains self-information or information about an individual that is usually hidden from being discussed or communicated to others. A self-disclosure facilitates the development and formation of meaningful and long-lasting interpersonal relationships (Shurur, 2015). The concept of self-disclosure is related to a person's topic, depth, and breadth. Previous findings also illustrate that the significance of self-disclosure is higher in communication mediated by computer devices than in face-to-face communication (Prawesti & Dewi, 2016).

Conflict also does not rule out the possibility of being created among individuals involved in the LDRR. The existence of conflicts in a relationship must have good conflict management so that the relationship can survive (Gilbertson et al., 2023). In addition to having good conflict management, LDRR relationships also require a communication medium that can be a bridge for each partner to communicate and resolve the conflict immediately. Based on the interview results above, the conflict resolution is with the platforms Whatsapp, Line, Telegram, and social media.

6. Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the LDRR carried out by teenagers in Gorontalo City is not spared from interpersonal conflicts. Generally, such conflicts have to do with disclosure to each other. With disclosure with a partner through digital media, individuals will gain empathy, support, respect, and equality. As a result, individuals will obtain a quality relationship with their partner even though they are separated by distance.

The media used by individuals to contact their partners are various platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Line, and others. The messages exchanged to take the form of text, images, photos, and stickers. Communicators and communicants exchange messages through these media, where the communicator is the party who takes the initiative to start communication. Self-disclosure also occurs among individuals involved in the LDRR.
where there is the disclosure of information-between communicators and communicants when exchanging one message the same as another.

Reference