

2-28-2017

# Keeping Love Alive: Communication Modes, Relational Satisfaction and Communication Satisfaction in Long-Distance Dating Relationships

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KEEPING LOVE ALIVE: COMMUNICATION MODES, RELATIONAL  
SATISFACTION AND COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION IN LONG-DISTANCE  
DATING RELATIONSHIPS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2017

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## ABSTRACT

Couples in long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) must determine how to best communicate with one another to maintain their relationship without the advantage of being geographically close. Fortunately, with advances in technology, individuals in LDDRs have multiple options regarding how they choose to communicate with their relational partner. These individuals may utilize more traditional modes, such as letter writing or phone calls, or more modern modes, such as text messaging or social media. However, not all of these communication modes may allow for satisfying communication or communication that benefits the relationship. Therefore, this study investigates how the frequency of use of different communication modes correlates with communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction. The responses of 126 participants were analyzed. Phone calls were found to correlate with the highest communication satisfaction, while text messaging correlated with the highest relational satisfaction. The results were examined through the lens of idealization as well as the advantages and disadvantages of communication modes that the participants addressed.

Keywords: Long-distance Dating Relationships, Communication Modes, Communication Satisfaction, Relational Satisfaction, Idealization, Computer-Mediated Communication

Dedicated to my wonderfully supportive friends, family, professors and BCM community

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am incredibly thankful for all of the people and organizations that have made completing this research possible. I am so grateful for my advisor, Dr. Jiemyoung Kong. Her constant encouragement and dedication helped me remain focused and positive even when work became strenuous. I am also thankful for my second reader, Dr. Blair Thompson, for leading me in the right direction while developing my thesis.

I am grateful for the Honors College for providing me with the opportunity to complete this research and for their support both academically and financially.

I would like to thank WKU's Department of Communication for being such a supportive, positive environment. The guidance and encouragement I have received has been much greater than I could ever have asked. I am incredibly grateful to have been able to study under professors that care about my academics as well as my personal life.

I am also thankful for my wonderful friends and family. Their constant belief that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to has always been an inspiration. I would also like to thank my community at the Baptist Campus Ministries for being a group filled with love and laughter.

Most importantly, I am grateful for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without whom none of this would ever have been possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

With the passage of time and advances in technology, we have come to live in a world where distance is not a great hindrance to communication. The Internet, text messaging, phone calls, video calls, and other communication technologies allow us to connect with individuals across the state, throughout the country, and from around the world. According to Dansie (2012), “83% of adults in the United States own a cell phone...among online adults, 92% use email with 61% using it daily. About two-thirds of online adults use social network sites” (p. 3). As communication technology use is clearly a part of many individuals’ everyday lives, it is not surprising that long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) are prevalent in today’s society. According to Maines (1994) “Distance relationships have become increasingly common in this country and elsewhere, with as many as one million people annually reporting being in a long-distance relationship” (as cited in Dainton & Aylor, 2002, p. 119). Therefore, it is imperative that communication scholars strive to understand how communication can aid in the success of these prominent relationships. A fair amount of research has been conducted in this area. However, sizable gaps still remain that lead to many unanswered questions.

Maguire and Kinney (2010) define a LDDR as “one in which it would be difficult or impossible for dating partners to see each other on a frequent basic” (p. 28). According

to Stafford, the geographic separation of LDDRs can occur for a variety of reasons, including emigration, military deployment, and educational or career demands (as cited in Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Stafford also asserted that this separation can lead to increased uncertainty about a relationship's future, decreased interdependence, and restricted communication (as cited in Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Therefore, partners in these relationships must utilize certain behaviors to aid in constructing and maintain their relationship while they are apart (Sahlstein, 2004). For example, according to Jiang and Hancock (2013) long-distance couples are more likely to avoid conflict and taboo topics, have lesser discussion of vital premarital decisions, and have more intimate activities and talk.

Despite this communicative adaptations, one would likely assume that long-distance couples have lesser relational satisfaction than geographically-close couples. However, communication scholars hold differing opinions regarding this topic. Some research has shown that long-distance couples have a tendency to idealize their partner, or form heightened perceptions of the relationship, in order to reduce uncertainty (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Furthermore, according to Maguire and Kinney (2010), some scholars report that relational partners must see each other frequently to increase relational satisfaction, while others assert that there is no relationship between relational quality and spending time together (p. 28-29). Clearly, further research must be orchestrated to eliminate this confusion.

The proposed study will assist in eradicating some topics of debate regarding communication in LDDRs. Research will be conducted to determine how the frequency

of use of different communication modes affects relational satisfaction and communication satisfaction in LDDRs. The study will examine more traditional forms of communication, such as phone calls and writing letters, as well as recently-developed communication technologies, such as Snapchat and FaceTime. Therefore, the proposed research will provide further insight into communication in LDDRs while addressing the effects of rapidly increasing use of communication technology.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Relational Satisfaction**

Relational satisfaction is, not surprisingly, a popular topic of discussion when researching LDDRs, especially since, according to Bergen and colleagues, there is a link between this satisfaction and one's health (as cited in Borelli, Rasmussen, Burkahart, & Sbarra, 2015). However, according to Merolla (2012), research provides mixed results regarding this variable. It would be reasonable to assume that a lack of face-to-face (FtF) communication and its related verbal and nonverbal cues would result in low relational satisfaction. However, while some research has shown that distance increases the likelihood of a breakup, other research shows that partners in a LDDR have equal or greater relational quality compared to those in a geographically-close relationship. For example, Roberts and Pistole (2009) found no significant difference in relational satisfaction between long-distance and geographically-close couples. Therefore, researchers must continue to conduct research to provide further insight into the workings of relational satisfaction in LDDRs.

Merolla (2012) utilized qualitative methods to investigate how the relational maintenance behaviors of partners in LDDRs before, during, and after separations affected relational satisfaction. The results indicated that individual, future-focused

maintenance activities positively predicted relational satisfaction, while, surprisingly, future-focused maintenance activities performed together negatively predicted relational satisfaction. Merolla asserted that fear and anticipation of being apart may cause this negative correlation. Overall, the results of this study demonstrated that how partners think about one another was the best predictor of relational satisfaction.

### **Idealization**

In one of the earliest studies addressing LDDRs, Stafford and Reske (1990) examined the effects of idealization in these relationships. According to Stafford and Merolla (2007), “Idealization is the tendency to describe a partner or relationship in overly positive terms” (as cited in Brody, 2013, p. 323). Stafford and Reske (1990) suggested that less frequent interaction in LDDRs could result in dating partners continuously idealizing one another (p. 275). Therefore, these couples are unlikely to adequately address undesirable qualities of one another and relational conflicts. After administering questionnaires to seventy-one couples in serious dating relationships, Stafford and Reske were able to support their suggestion (p. 276).

Jiang and Hancock (2013) also conducted a study with results that pointed toward idealization in LDDRs. This research consisted of a diary study and surveys regarding relationship characteristics among sixty-seven couples in LDDRs. The results indicated that many of the participants disclosed more during their communication, and the relational partners idealized this disclosure. Consequently, the idealization of this disclosure positively affected intimacy and perceived partner responsiveness. Therefore, this research shows that idealization occurs in a variety of ways and affects many factors in LDDRs.

Brody's (2013) investigation also inspected idealization in long-distance relationships (p. 323). However, this study focused on long-distance friendships (LDFs) rather than LDDRs. Brody (2013) examined "the effects of infrequent FtF contact (due to geographic distance) and frequency of mediated communication on relational outcomes in LDFs" (p. 324). The purpose of this research was to identify the relationship between relational success and frequency of FtF and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in LDFs. As CMC was a valuable construct to this research, the study occurred through the lens of the hyperpersonal perspective. This perspective addresses idealization in online relationships. Brody gathered data from 591 surveys to college students and determined that CMC in LDFs resulted in greater relational satisfaction than FtF communication (p. 326, 330). Brody (2013) also made an important assertion regarding advanced communication technology:

As partners are more easily able to keep in touch and discuss controversial and routine topics, they may be less likely to idealize their partners due to restricted communication, which was formerly a necessary component of LDRs and LDFs. (p. 330)

Therefore, advances in communication technology should cause communication scholars to change their earlier perspectives regarding idealization in long-distance relationships.

### **Effects of Communication Technology**

As scholars continue to investigate LDDRs, they must address alterations that are the result of technological advancement. According to Valkenburg and Peter, adolescents have shifted their use of computers from entertainment purposes to using them as

communication tools (as cited in Klein, 2013). Furthermore, Dainton and Aylor (2002) stated, “With the growth of interactive media technologies, scholars have turned their attention to understanding the uses that individuals make of mediated communication” (p. 119). For example, Jiang and Hancock (2013) found that long-distance couples relied more on mediated communication and lengthier calls and video chats to make up for their fewer overall interactions. However, according to Merolla (2012), research has shown that mediated communication does not entirely compensate for the deficits a lack of FtF communication causes. Merolla (2012) stated, “...successfully maintaining relationships at a distance is not dependent solely on technology” (p. 792). Therefore, research has been and must continue to be conducted to investigate the effects of communication technology on LDDRs.

Social networking sites (SNS) are one such technological advantage that affect how couples in LDDRs interact. According to Billedo, Kerkhof, and Finkenauer (2015), interaction via SNS provides opportunities for public displays of affection. These opportunities are vital for long-distance couples, as they would be non-existent or minimal otherwise. Billedo et al. (2015) conducted a study to investigate how the use of SNS differed between long-distance and geographically-close couples. The scholars hypothesized that individuals in LDDRs would have higher use intensity of SNS than those in geographically-close relationships. They also hypothesized that couples in LDDRs would more often utilize SNS for strategic and routine maintenance behaviors of their relationship than geographically-close couples. After utilizing qualitative methods, the

results supported the hypotheses. Therefore, these results show how long-distance couples use one facet of communication technology to benefit their relationship.

Furthermore, Perry and Werner-Wilson (2011) conducted research to determine how and why couples (not necessarily long-distance) utilized CMC for problem solving and their satisfaction with this communication. First, Perry and Werner-Wilson presented two main differences between FtF communication and CMC: social cues and message delay. There is an absence of social cues, such as facial expressions or tone of voice, in CMC. Furthermore, there is often a delay between message transmissions in CMC that is not present in FtF communication. The scholars employed both quantitative and qualitative methods with a sample of 47 couples to further investigate this phenomenon.

The participants of this study spoke to the advantages of CMC. Some individuals stated that CMC allows time for reflection and considering what they want to say. Others stated that interruption decreases in CMC and allows each partner to say what they want. Furthermore, some participants asserted that nonverbal cues in FtF communication were a hindrance, and their absence in CMC was beneficial. Others also declared that CMC allows for a cooling off period that helps lessen conflict. Finally, the results showed that couples had equal satisfaction with CMC as FtF communication when problem solving. Overall, this study spoke to the advantages of CMC. As this form of communication is often used by individuals in LDDRs, it shows a great deal about how this communication can be effective.

Furthermore, Dainton and Aylor's (2002) study focused on technology in LDDRs through adopting the assumptions of a uses and gratifications (U&G) perspective which

suggests that individuals use media with the specific goal of satisfying needs in mind and are able to voice their motives and needs. Overall, this perspective assumes that needs can be and are met through the use of technology. With this perspective, Dainton and Aylor studied the relationship between relational maintenance strategies and frequency of use of multiple communication channels in LDDRs. After gathering data from questionnaires to ten individuals, Dainton and Aylor discovered that the uses and gratifications perspective is supported in the context of LDDRs. The overall findings, however, mostly led to a need for further research:

Taken as a whole, this study suggests that scholars studying the maintenance of relationships, particularly LDRs, should not limit themselves to a focus on FtF interaction, but should also examine the role of all communication channels in relational maintenance. (Dainton & Aylor, 2002, p. 127)

Clearly, this study advocated for the need for further research addressing all possible means of communication in LDDRs.

### **Inherent Nature of LDDRs**

Not all communication scholars, however, agree that modern technology aids in true relational satisfaction. Stafford (2010) inquired into the possibility of individuals in LDDRs transforming the constraints of geographic distance and limited FtF communication in order to achieve relational success. This research was conducted while focusing on interdependence theory. According to Kelley and Thibaut, “Interdependence theory attempts to explain social behavior based on individuals’ evaluation and reaction to their relational situation” (as cited in Stafford, 2010, p. 276). Therefore, this study

investigated individuals' perceptions of their LDDR. According to Stephen, couples in LDDRs adapt to communication constraints through limiting their communication topics to love, intimacy and relational issues (as cited in Stafford, 2010, p. 279). Consequently, these couples may not be addressing other important topics. After collecting data from surveys to 340 individuals, Stafford (2010) asserted that this limited communication most likely results in LDDR partners' false perceptions of relational quality. This additional research causes the true nature of LDDRs to become unclear.

Furthermore, Sahlstein (2004) asserted that LDDRs have a dialectical nature. Partners in these relationships are constantly navigating how being together and apart works with and against being together and apart. Sahlstein utilized qualitative methods to investigate these relational dialectics among twenty long-distance couples, and this research yielded multiple findings. First, in terms of how being together constrains being apart, 20.9% of the couples asserted that the time spent together creates a standard for interaction that cannot be met when the couple is apart. Furthermore, regarding how being apart constrains being together, 6.9% of the couples declared that time spent together is often spent communicating about topics that are difficult to talk about when they are apart, such as the future and the state of the relationship. On the other hand, the couples also discussed how being apart enabled being together. Interestingly, 10.7% of the couples in the study reported that there was more open communication when they were apart, and this open communication enhanced the time spent together. Although this research was conducted prior to the communicative technology we know possess, the findings still provide insight into the inherently dialectical nature of communication within LDDRs.

Maguire and Kinney (2010) contributed yet another element to the study of LDDRs: internal and external stressors. Maguire and Kinney (2010) examined “the extent to which the perceived helpfulness of communication coping strategies is associated with relational satisfaction in both stressful and relatively stress-free LDDRs” (p. 28). This research was performed under the assumption that stress levels in LDDRs affected communication strategies and relational satisfaction and resulted in an encouraging assumption. The results of the study supported the notion that LDDRs are not consistently problematic. Therefore, communication scholars can unearth methods for success in LDDRs. After administering surveys to 119 female college students, Maguire and Kinney discovered that stress levels affect the outcome of communication strategies in LDDRs. Consequently, couples in LDDR must adapt their communication strategies based on the current amount of stress in the relationship, and communication scholars can discover the most effective strategies in different situations.

After examining communication research regarding LDDRs, one finds that further investigation is clearly required to fill in current gaps and resolve conflicting arguments. The proposed study would aid in fulfilling these needs. Idealization, communication technology, and relational satisfaction in LDDRs are topics that must be addressed. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: How does the use and frequency of different modes of communication affect relational satisfaction in long-distance dating relationships?

RQ2: How does the use and frequency of different modes of communication affect overall communication satisfaction in long-distance dating relationships?

As previously stated, idealization is highly prevalent in LDDRs. Couples who utilize less rich forms of communication are likely to idealize their relationship more and, therefore, will report higher relational satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formed:

H1: LDDR partners who report most often utilizing text messaging will report the highest relational satisfaction.

Additionally, with advances in technology, LDDR partners are able to have richer CMC through video calls. Video calls allow partners to communicate while receiving verbal and nonverbal cues from one another. This rich form of communication will likely result in higher communication satisfaction. Therefore, a second hypothesis was formed:

H2: LDDR partners who report utilizing video calls at least 1-3 times per week will report the highest overall communication satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### **Procedure**

This research study utilized a survey administered online using a convenience sampling method. After Western Kentucky University's (WKU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the project, professors from multiple departments were emailed regarding the nature of the study and a link to the online survey. The instructors were asked to inform their students of the opportunity to participate. Furthermore, emails were sent to the academic advisor in WKU's Department of Communication a staff member in WKU's Honors College regarding the study. Consequently, the advisor and staff member sent emails to all students enrolled in a course in the Department of Communication and all honors scholars, respectively. Finally, after amending the initial IRB application, the scholar posted a description of and link to the survey on her personal Facebook page.

Prior to accessing the survey, students were presented with a consent form and instructions stating that the completion of the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Completion of the survey resulted in each participant's implied consent. The participants were also instructed to answer the main survey items away from and without input from their relational partner. Students were also given an opportunity to provide their email address after completing the survey in order to be placed in a drawing for one

of four \$50 gift cards. The email addresses were in no way attached to the participant's responses.

### **Participants**

This study had a total of 126 participants (N=126). Individuals only participated in this study if they were currently involved in a long-distance dating relationship (LDDR). For the purposes of this study, the following definition was used to describe an LDDR: “[a relationship] in which it would be difficult or impossible for dating partners to see each other on a frequent basis” (Maguire & Kinney, 2010, p. 28). The students were asked to only participate in the study if their relationship matched this definition.

The survey sample consisted of primarily female participants (81.7%), and the majority of participants identified ethnically as Caucasian/White (95.2%). Participants were predominantly in the 18-22 year age range (89.7%), followed by 23-27 years (8.7%) and 28 or more years (1.6%). The survey participants also selected the most accurate description of their LDDR. 77.8% of the participants claimed to be in a serious romantic relationship (n=98), while 19% claimed to be in a casual dating relationship (n=19) and 7.1% were engaged (n=9). The participants had been dating their long-distance partner anywhere from one month to six years, and the relationships had been long-distance from a range of one month to five years. The participants lived anywhere from 30 miles to 10,000 miles away from their dating partner. See Table 1 for a full presentation of descriptive statistics of the sample.

### **Measures**

This research study employed a cross-sectional survey. The survey was composed of 37 items divided into 4 main sections. Participants responded to items regarding: their frequency of use of different communication modes, advantages and disadvantages of the most frequently utilized communication mode, their relationship satisfaction, and their communication satisfaction.

### **Frequency of Use of Communication Modes.**

The first section measured the frequency of use of different modes of communication between each long-distance couple. The scale used was an adaptation of Dainton and Aylor's (2002) scale, and adjustments were made by including specific modes of computer-mediated communication. Participants ranked their frequency of use of 7 modes of communication, both traditional and computer-mediated, on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 representing never/very rarely and 6 representing multiple times per day. Items included the frequency of use of phone calls, text messaging, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.), and face-to-face communication.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages.**

The second section included two open-ended questions regarding the most frequently used mode of communication. Participants were asked to state the greatest advantage and disadvantage of this mode. These items were used to add depth to the results of the study.

### **Relationship Satisfaction.**

The third section measured participants' relationship satisfaction with their long-distance partner using Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale ( $\alpha=0.86$ ). The

Relationship Assessment Scale includes 7 items on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing low satisfaction and 5 representing high satisfaction. Participants responded to items such as, “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” and, “How much do you love your partner?” (Hendrick, 1988).

### **Communication Satisfaction.**

The fourth and final section measured the participants’ overall communication satisfaction. This scale was based on Steele and Plenty’s (2015) adaptation of Hecht’s (1978) Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory ( $\alpha=0.93$ ). For the purposes of the study, 4 items were removed from the original inventory, resulting in 15 items. Participants were asked to respond to the items based on their overall communication with their long-distance partner. Sample items included, “...I feel that I can talk about anything with him or her,” “...I feel that we can each get to say what we want,” and “...I feel conversations flow smoothly.” Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### **Data Analysis**

In order to determine the relationship between frequency of communication modes and relational satisfaction, the data was analyzed through the correlation technique. The correlation technique was also used to analyze the relationship between frequency of communication modes and communication satisfaction. Seeing as idealization also causes higher reports in relational satisfaction and partners are likely to self-report higher satisfaction in general, predictions derived from the data may not be entirely accurate. Therefore, correlation was used rather than regression.

For analysis of the open-ended questions, the researcher generated six variables regarding advantages and seven variables regarding disadvantages. The responses were then coded, and the frequency of each variable was tabulated.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Frequency of Use of Communication Modes**

Participants of this study as a whole tended to use text messaging most frequently, as 69.8% of the sample (n=88) utilized text messaging to communicate with their long-distance partner multiple times per day. On the other hand, letter writing and email were the modes of communication used the least by far. 80.8% of participants (n=101) wrote letters never/very rarely, and the remaining 24 participants only wrote letters 1-2 times per month. Furthermore, 101 participants (80.2%) never/very rarely utilized email to communicate with their relational partner. Additionally, participants most often utilized phone calls 1-3 times per week (33.3%), social media multiple times per day (23.8%), video calls 1-3 times per week (29.6%), and the majority of participants (58.7%) communicated with their relational partner FtF 1-2 times per month.

#### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

Participants were asked to answer two-ended questions regarding the greatest advantage and disadvantage of their most frequently utilized mode of communication with their relational partner. The responses to the first question regarding the greatest advantages were coded as follows: 1=convenience; 2=feeling connected with their partner; 3=open communication; 4=presence of nonverbal cues; 5=ability to

communicate constantly/throughout the day; 6=other. Convenience was overwhelmingly expressed as the greatest advantage, as this coded variable appeared 78 times (60.5%).

The responses to the second question regarding the greatest disadvantages were coded as follows: 1=lack of verbal and nonverbal cues/interactions; 2=technical difficulties; 3=communicating around different schedules and time zones; 4=impersonal communication/feeling disconnected; 5=forgetting to reply/delays in responses; 6=difficulty having in-depth conversations; 7=other. A lack of verbal and nonverbal cues/interactions was most often cited as the greatest disadvantage (52 times; 35.4%) while technical difficulties appeared 24 times (16.3%) and impersonal communication/feeling disconnected appeared 23 times (15.6%).

### **Communication Modes and Relational Satisfaction**

RQ1 inquired into how the use and frequency of different modes of communication affected relational satisfaction. Hypothesis 1 predicted that LDDR partners who report most often utilizing text messaging would report the highest relational satisfaction. The data analysis supported this hypothesis. More frequent use of text messaging correlated with the highest mean of relational satisfaction (0.339), and this correlation was significant at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, more frequent use of FtF communication correlated with the second highest mean of relational satisfaction (0.353), and this correlation was also significant at the 0.05 level. More frequent use of phone calls was also found to positively and significantly correlate with relational satisfaction ( $M=0.197$ ) at the 0.01 level. Finally, more frequent use of social media was found to be negatively correlated with relational satisfaction ( $M=-0.195$ ), and this correlation was

significant at the 0.01 level. See Table 2 for a complete summary of the correlation between frequency of use of communication modes and relational satisfaction.

### **Communication Modes and Communication Satisfaction**

RQ2 investigated the relationship between frequency of use of different communication modes and communication satisfaction within LDDRs. Hypothesis 2 predicted that LDDR partners who reported utilizing video calls at least 1-3 times per week would report the highest overall communication satisfaction. The data analysis did not show this hypothesis to hold true. More frequent use of phone calls was correlated with the highest mean of communication satisfaction (0.276), and this correlation was significant at the 0.01 level. This relationship was the only significant correlation derived from the data regarding this research question. See Table 3 for a complete summary of the correlation between frequency of use of communication modes and communication satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a great deal of insight into communication within LDDRs and modern society's utilization of technological advancement. It is not surprising that text messaging was utilized most often, as this mode provides the convenience and constant connection that the majority of participants found advantageous. Furthermore, it is not surprising that letter writing was hardly ever utilized, as this mode is much less convenient and results in very delayed responses.

The advantages and disadvantages of frequently used communication modes also speak to the inherent nature of LDDRs and how communicative expectations have changed with advances in technology. The participants of this study appreciated having a convenient means of communication that allowed them to openly communicate, feel connected, and communicate throughout the day with their relational partner. However, the participants also asserted that a lack of verbal/nonverbal cues and interactions, technical difficulties, and finding time to communicate among busy schedules and different time zones caused difficulties with certain communication modes. Therefore, although LDDR partners may find methods to communicate that are convenient, these forms of communication may not always be rich enough or dependable. Furthermore,

these individuals must determine how to foster open communication and connectivity while balancing problems with technology and simply finding the time to communicate.

Based on the results, text messaging, phone calls, and FtF communication correlate with higher relational satisfaction. However, one must be sure to analyze these results with consideration of the aforementioned prominence of idealization in LDDRs. Text messaging provides a convenient means of communication for long-distance partners that can be used throughout the day and allow a couple to feel connected. However, this communication may only focus on surface-level topics, such as daily activities. With a lack of verbal/nonverbal cues and interactions, couples may avoid talking about the state of or problems within the relationship. This lack of discussion may cause partners to idealize one another and have a false perception of the relationship. Phone calls, on the other hand, at least allow long-distance partners to hear one another's voices and to decipher verbal cues, such as tone of voice. These couples may also communicate more openly through phone calls, as it takes more physical effort to type out a response than to simply speak. This open communication could account for the higher relational satisfaction. Furthermore, FtF communication is often rare for long-distance couples, so it is not surprising that this mode of communication correlates with high relational satisfaction. However, this correlation is not as strong as that between text messaging and relational satisfaction. Again, idealization may play a role in this relationship. When a couple speaks FtF, they may be more likely to talk about the relationship, their feelings, and any problems they may have. This no longer allows the couple to idealize the relationship, and they must work through the reality of their

situation. Finally, the use of social media was found to negatively correlate with relational satisfaction. Communication through social media, such as Snapchat or Twitter, is often associated with shorter responses and is not very conducive to in-depth communication. Technical difficulties and partners simply forgetting to reply can also greatly hinder this form of communication, and these difficulties were seen as highly disadvantageous to the participants. Therefore, this form of communication can be difficult and lack the connection that LDDR partners seem to value. Consequently, it correlates with lower relational satisfaction.

Additionally, phone calls were the only mode of communication that correlated with communication satisfaction. This finding is surprising upon initial analysis. Hypothesis 2 predicted that video calls would positively correlate with communication satisfaction, as this mode allows for both verbal and nonverbal cues. However, video calls are often susceptible to the technical difficulties that the participants addressed. Furthermore, couples must not only find time to communicate via video call among their busy schedules and differing time zones but must also find a place with some form of Internet connection. Phone calls, on the other hand, are prone to fewer technical difficulties and can be much more convenient, which was a highly valued advantage among the participants. Phone calls also allow for verbal cues and may be conducive to more open communication. Therefore, it is reasonable for phone calls to positively correlate with communication satisfaction.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study provided added information regarding LDDRs, there were limitations and interesting findings that call for further research. First, the sample was not very diverse. The majority of participants were female, Caucasian and from 18-22 years old. Further research should be conducted to investigate how older and ethnically diverse individuals communicate within LDDRs, and more male participants and a larger sample in general could be gathered to provide more well-rounded results. Furthermore, the effect of idealization on the results is not addressed in data analysis but is rather assumed. Further research should be conducted to better understand how idealization plays a role in each mode of communication.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, this research provides a bit of clarity into the world of communication within LDDRs. As technology continues to advance, individuals begin to have a greater desire for convenient communication rather than more rich or satisfying forms. As our world becomes more connected, we must continue to investigate how long-distance communication can be as effective as possible in maintaining relationships and meeting the various needs of individuals.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics (N=126)*

Variables	%	n
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	18.3	23
Female	81.7	103
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
African American/Black	0.8	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.6	2
Caucasian/White	95.2	120
Hispanic/Latino	1.6	2
Other	0.8	1
<b>Age</b>		
18-22 years old	89.7	113
23-27 years old	8.7	11
28+ years old	1.6	2
<b>Type of Dating Relationship</b>		
Casual dating relationship	15.1	19
Serious romantic relationship	77.8	98
Engaged	7.1	9

**Table 2***Summary of Correlation between Modes of Communication and Relational Satisfaction*

Measures	Phone call	Social Media	Letter	Texting	Video call	Email	Face- to- Face
How well does your partner meet your needs?	.322**	-.088	.216*	.254**	.206*	.127	.324**
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	.199*	-.184*	.189*	.234**	.098	.001	.229**
How good is your relationship compared to most?	.171	-.233**	.120	.287**	.083	.073	.289**
How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?	-.054	.136	-.049	-.343**	.067	.054	-.248**
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	.206*	-.084	.151	.162	-.048	.071	.234**
How much do you love your partner?	.217*	-.025	.133	.285**	.027	.032	.151
How many problems are there in your relationship?	-.045	.190*	.046	-.222*	.058	.032	-.247**
Mean of Relational Satisfaction	.197*	-.195*	.157	.339**	.044	.044	.353**

*Note.* N = 126, except for Letter and Video call where N = 125. \*.

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3**

*Summary of Correlation between Modes of Communication and Communication Satisfaction*

Measures	Phone call	Social Media	Letter	Texting	Video call	Email	Face-to-face
He or she lets me know that I am communicating effectively.	.303**	.047	.167	.031	.136	.135	.014
I would like to continue having conversations like this one.	.105	.021	.042	.041	.071	.049	-.019
Very dissatisfied with our conversations.	-.235**	-.003	-.072	-.227*	-.111	.032	-.173
Like I have something else to do.	.070	.066	-.009	-.020	-.017	-.031	-.076
He or she shows me that he or she understand what I say.	.203*	.034	.089	.103	.109	.113	.102
Very satisfied with our conversations.	.266**	.051	.134	.203*	.141	.037	.098
He or she expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say.	.226*	.049	.197*	.229**	.162	.133	-.006
I do NOT enjoy our conversations.	-.189*	-.080	-.117	-.211*	-.121	-.118	-.140
I can talk about anything with him or her.	.340**	-.027	.214*	.287**	.122	.115	.279**

We each get to say what we want.	.294**	.034	.095	.004	.112	-.014	.101
We can laugh easily together.	.260**	.051	.182*	.204*	.030	-.002	.252**
Conversations flow smoothly.	.079	-.079	.117	.065	.077	.100	.051
He or she frequently says things that add little to the conversation.	-.109	.040	-.080	-.044	-.084	-.113	-.086
We often talk about things that I am not interested in.	-.138	.120	-.080	-.049	-.124	.015	-.101
Mean of Communication Satisfaction	.276**	-.005	.174	.129	.168	.092	.132

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*Note.* N = 126, except for Letter and Video call where N = 125 and “Like I have something else to do” item. \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).