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LOVE AT A DISTANCE:
THE INFLUENCE OF FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM ON THE
QUALITY OF LONG-DISTANCE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Communication

By Aleksandra Laska

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ABSTRACT

Long-distance romantic relationships, defined as relationships where partners live in distant locations, are becoming increasingly common. Existing literature suggests that the significance of geographic proximity in selecting partners may have diminished as societies rely on connections through online networks. Yet long-distance relationships remain an understudied phenomenon due to a widely shared view that such connections are prone to failure. As the number of individuals engaged in long-distance relationships remain on the rise, it is important to understand the patterns of online communication between partners in order to sustain such relationships and improve relational quality. Social media platforms are commonly used for communication purposes and continue to grow in popularity. In addition, previous studies have demonstrated that platforms such as Instagram or Facebook are broadly adopted by romantic partners and are utilized to sustain constant communication and make the relationship public. Consequently, this study explores the impact of Facebook and Instagram on the quality of long-distance relationships. Through in-depth interviews with nine individuals and nine couples currently involved in such relationships, the study identifies communication patterns among individuals in long-distance relationships, as well as positive and negative effects of social media usage. While challenges such as jealousy and technological distractions are noted, results suggest that Facebook and Instagram can improve relationship quality by supporting frequent and varied communication between partners.

Keywords: Long-distance relationships, social media, communication, relationship quality, Facebook, Instagram.

RESUMO

Os relacionamentos românticos à distância, definidos como aqueles em que os parceiros vivem em locais distantes, estão a tornar-se cada vez mais comuns. A literatura existente sugere que a importância da proximidade geográfica na escolha de parceiros pode ter diminuído à medida que as sociedades dependem de ligações através de redes online. No entanto, as relações à distância continuam a ser um fenómeno pouco estudado devido à opinião de que tais ligações são propensas ao fracasso. Uma vez que o número de indivíduos envolvidos em relacionamentos à distância continua a crescer, é importante compreender os padrões de comunicação online entre parceiros, de forma a sustentar essas relações e melhorar a qualidade relacional. As plataformas de redes sociais são normalmente utilizadas para fins de comunicação e continuam a crescer em popularidade. Além disso, estudos anteriores demonstraram que plataformas como o Instagram ou o Facebook são amplamente adotadas por parceiros românticos e são utilizadas para manter uma comunicação constante e tornar o relacionamento público. Consequentemente, este estudo explora o impacto do Facebook e do Instagram na qualidade dos relações à distância. Através de entrevistas aprofundadas com nove indivíduos e nove casais atualmente envolvidos em tais relações, o estudo identifica padrões de comunicação entre indivíduos em relações à distância, bem como os efeitos positivos e negativos da utilização das redes sociais. Embora se observem desafios como o ciúme e as distrações tecnológicas, os resultados sugerem que o Facebook e o Instagram podem melhorar a qualidade da relação ao apoiar uma comunicação frequente e variada entre os parceiros.

Palavras-chave: Relacionamentos à distância, redes sociais, comunicação, qualidade do relacionamento, Facebook, Instagram.

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INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relationships “are no longer confined to people living in the same village” (Utz, 2007, p. 695), as people tend to form connections that are globally dispersed and sustained by modern communication technologies (Utz, 2007). This shift is also evident in romantic relationships: nearly a quarter of internet users, who are open to romantic experiences, foster their social connections with the use of the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2013, para. 6) and Hertlein et al. (2013) emphasized that technological advancements have altered the experience of connecting with distant partners through virtual world. Prior to these advancements, there were not as many opportunities to form long-distance relationships (LDRs), as it was often related to high costs and constrained possibilities. However, Hertlein et al. (2013) suggested that today’s online communication channels, including social media, offer a chance to form such relationships regardless of status, location, or financial situation.

LDRs are those in which romantic partners reside in different geographical locations and periodically come together for reunions, before parting once again (Pistole et al., 2010). There are several factors which influence the decision of geographical separation, such as work and education (Pistole et al., 2010), personal opportunities (Clark & Mass, 2015), or commitments to friends and family (Kelmer et al., 2013). Within the field of interpersonal communication, LDRs are a divisive element. They are frequent and increasing in numbers (Harris & Edwards, 2014), yet many scholars argue that these relationships are doomed to fail, while others defend them, claiming that technological progress blurs spatial boundaries and enables the maintenance of such relationships. According to Harris & Edwards (2014), LDRs remain an understudied phenomenon due to a broadly held view among the public and academia that this type of connection is lacking essential factors that lead to the success of a relationship. Kelmer et al. (2013) expanded this argument by explaining that it is commonly believed that LDRs are prone to failure, since geographical distance might present various challenges. On the contrary, it is argued that the significance of geographical proximity in selecting partners may have diminished as societies rely on connections through online networks (Haandrikman, 2019).

Global engagement with social media platforms is significant (Kepios, 2024), as a recent survey reported that 63.7% of people around the world are active on those platforms (Statista, 2024). In terms of popularity, Facebook is the undisputed leader, maintaining a wide gap over competitors, while Instagram is the 3rd-most popular platform among social media users (Dixon, 2023). The widespread presence of social media is confirmed not only by the number of users, but also by the usage habits, as 70% of Facebook users and nearly 60% of Instagram users report that they utilize these platforms on a daily basis (Pew Research Center, 2023). In addition, previous studies have suggested that social media may influence the quality of romantic relationships (Nasiche, 2024). More importantly, existing literature showed a dual impact on couples' satisfaction, as social media platforms offer numerous benefits, while also posing new challenges. While social media platforms facilitate constant connection (Barbish et al., 2019), the creation of shared networks (Gomillion et al., 2017), and the maintenance of long-distance connections (Billedo et al., 2015), they can also cause technological distraction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2014), conflicts and misunderstandings (Walęcka-Matyja & Dębska, 2023), or jealousy (Green, 2012).

As much of the existing studies focused broadly on the impact of social media on romantic relationships in general, this research takes a more targeted approach, by investigating how communication through Facebook and Instagram influences LDRs specifically, rather than those where partners live in the same location. The study aims to explore the dynamics between relational communication, social media platforms, and the quality of relationship among couples who are regularly affected by the distance. Therefore, the following research question was formulated: "How does the use of Facebook and Instagram impact the quality of long-distance romantic relationships?"

This thesis is divided into two main parts: the first section comprises three chapters presenting the existing literature on the topics of social media, new technologies, romantic relationships, and the quality of relationships. The second part presents the methods used for this research, based on a qualitative approach. The method section includes the description of participants, namely nine couples and nine individuals who are currently involved in LDRs. The methods section also includes the details concerning the interviews with participants and the procedures of analysis. The gathered responses are analysed and

presented in the results section. Lastly, results were compared to existing literature, which allowed for discussion and further recommendations.

PART I – LITERATURE REVIEW

1. SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

1.1.DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA

The term social media has been the subject of a great deal of academic research, including the complexity and dynamic nature of this phenomenon. Over the past years, several scholars have challenged the definition of the term. Social media has started to be perceived as “an umbrella term that describes a variety of online platforms” (Aichner et al., 2021, p. 215). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). According to the authors, the phrase ‘Web 2.0’ came into use to express an innovative paradigm in which software developers and users started engaging with the World Wide Web differently. The creation and distribution of content has not been exclusively executed by individuals; it experienced continuous modifications through the collaboration of all users. As for User-Generated Content, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) perceive this term as the collective result of all the ways individuals utilize social media, and define it as “the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users” (p. 61). Consequently, social media can be understood as online spaces which enable the transmission of UGC and are based on the fundamentals of Web 2.0.

Carr and Hayes (2015) add that social media are interactive channels that enable communication through user-generated content (p. 49-50). The emergence of Web 2.0 can be considered a breakthrough in the user-technology relationship. Murugesan (2007) offered another perspective focused directly on social aspects and perceived Web 2.0 as a new technology that is centered around people and focused on collaboration, sharing, active user mode, and interactions. Web 2.0 creates an online space for people, in which each person can participate, rather than be a passive member. It is also the beginning of social networking, and active participation of users in the social media context (p. 34-35). Murugesan explained the new features and functions, which improved the social interactions of users, and described the simplicity, or user-friendly attitude of Web 2.0 in comparison to the previous iteration of the Web. Social media platforms are based on the features of Web

2.0. Sistik-Chandler (2012) argues that the characteristics of Web 2.0 are embedded in society, and performed, inter alia, through social media platforms. The author describes the motives of ‘connective’ and ‘online community’, which bring people’s attention and encourage them to bond together through social media (p. 78-83).

Despite the common foundational principles underpinning social media, there are clear differences between various platforms. Gong and Yang (2020) divided social media platforms into six categories, namely “microblogging sites, social networking sites, content sharing sites, products, and service review sites, collaborative knowledge sharing sites, and others” (p. 2). Their classification distinguishes among social media platforms, with Instagram being categorized as a content-sharing platform, and Facebook as a social-networking site. Despite the categorization presented by the authors, this research will consider Instagram not only as a content-sharing platform, but also a communication platform. Building on this argument, it is essential to present another way of classification made by Vuori and Jusilla (2016). The scholars created *5C categorization* of social media platforms, which also includes the purpose and tools representing each category. In their research, Instagram is qualified under the category “communicating”, the purpose of which is “publishing, discussing, expressing oneself, showing opinion, sharing, influencing, storing” (p. 27). On the contrary, Facebook is assigned under the “connecting” category, which serves the purpose of linking individuals and facilitating their interactions (p. 28).

1.2. SOCIAL MEDIA: PATTERNS AND FEATURES OF COMMUNICATION

Perrin (2015) compared data over a period of 10 years (2005-2015), and the most important finding of his study was that 90% of young adults (aged 18-29) actively use social media. According to Perrin, the use of social media increases every year, and young people are the ones who use it the most. It is essential to highlight that the period Perrin studied took place nearly a decade ago, which suggests that the group of “young people” under study consisted of Millennials. Nevertheless, Chaffey (2024) pointed out that the prevalence of social media platforms continues to expand in 2024 and it is observable across diverse demographics. In line with his argument, a recent report suggested that the global engagement with social media platforms is notable, as more than half of the global population utilizes these platforms

(Kepios, 2024). According to a recent survey, the percentage of people using social media around the world is 63.7%; however, it should be noted that there are visible demographic differences, as in Europe 98% of people between the age 15 and 24 represent the largest tested population of social media users (Statista, 2024).

Considering popularity, Facebook is the indisputable leader, maintaining a broad gap over competitors, while Instagram is the 3rd-most popular platform among participants (Dixon, 2023). The ubiquity of both social media platforms is demonstrated not only by the number of users, but also by the usage habits. 70% of Facebook users and nearly 60% of Instagram users report that they utilize these platforms on a daily basis, with at least one visit per day (Pew Research Center, 2023) and a median daily usage time of nearly 2.5 hours (Kepios, 2024).

1.2.1. SOCIAL MEDIA FEATURES

According to Dawot and Ibrahim (2014), each social networking site is characterized by unique features, and they constantly introduce new elements. The integration of novel features aims to accomplish social networking objectives and goals, which include: “to generate online communities, to provide the creation of the interaction, to share user-created content among the members of online communities” (p. 178).

Table 1 presents the findings of Öndera and Gümüükaya (2010), who analysed the most popular social networking sites and distinguished the main four features of these platforms, namely “user profiles, create online connections, join online groups, communication with online connections lists” (p. 470).

Table 1 Main features of social network sites (Öndera & Gümüükaya, 2010).

User profiles	UCC sharing
Create online connections	Opinion sharing feature
Join online groups	Access to information
Communicate with online connection lists	Keep users

With reference to Table 1, the primary feature (user profiles) enables users to set up an account and create a profile. Moreover, the profile is connected to the contact list, which is visible for all individuals and facilitates the process of network building. The second feature is strictly related to sharing content and opinions. It allows users to interact with the content published by other individuals. The third characteristic comprises online groups and it provides users with the option to get information about other users by navigating to their profile page. Finally, the last feature aims to empower users to directly communicate with each other through the site's e-mail system available on the profile page (Öndera & Gümüükaya, 2010).

Machcinska (2013) believes that communication is one of the two main features of social media platforms. The author highlights that the old model of conveying a message from one sender to a general public has faded away. In recent years, users expect interactions and desire discussions with others. Through social media, they establish contacts, have conversations, build relationships, and participate in communities that share the same interest. Moreover, "the users value the transparency, sincerity, and authenticity of communications" (Machcinska, 2013, p. 269). As pointed out by Deluga (2017), the media evolution has contributed to changes in the perception of various stimuli within society. Modern technologies facilitate information processes, leading to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships. In the case of social media, these processes are fuelled by "multifaceted user interactions, advanced communication functions, content creation in the virtual realm... as well as access to real-time information" (p. 47). Expanding on the previous point, Ellison et al. (2007) found a positive correlation between Facebook use and social media capital, which is defined as the assets accessible to individuals via their social connections. Meikle (2016) defined social media as "networked communication platforms... that enable the convergence of public and personal communication" (p. 10). The author argues that social media platforms stand out from other forms of media through their technological advancements focused on convenience of communication. In addition, these platforms unite the public and personal communication since now they "both take place in the same frame" (p. 12).

While the above-mentioned literature shows that communication occurs on social networking sites level, others have addressed how it manifests in practice. Tupamahu et al.

(2023) mentioned that “social media communication involves the exchange of information, ideas, and messages using digital technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram” (p. 682). Moreover, it is important to add that all of the information, ideas and messages can be presented in different ways. Social media platforms provide users with several features, which enable them to ‘create new language’ and new forms of conveying messages. These platforms are not just tools for cultivating universally recognized patterns of communication but also a space where innovative forms such as communication through emoji or memes are created. Tupamahu et al. (2023) defined these new ways of communicating as a ‘netspeak’, which consists of “acronyms, abbreviations, emoticons, and other non-standard linguistic forms” (p. 683). The authors highlight that this form of language is distinctive to online communities, as well as created by them.

There are several common features of Instagram and Facebook that scholars have previously discussed. boyd (2010) mentioned four main features of social networking sites, which are integrated within the platforms, namely “profiles, friends lists, public commenting tools, and stream-based updates” (p. 4). According to the author, profiles are crucial in representing users and serve as focal points for interactions. Individuals shape their profiles in an active manner, creating the depiction of online self within the digital environment. Friends lists allows individuals to connect with people whom they wish to stay in-touch with. The third feature, namely public commenting tools, facilitate interactions between social media users and allow them to engage in shared interests or conversations on profiles. Lastly, stream-based updates, such as *profile updates*, provide a stream of updates from friends, or other individuals from the list of friends. While individual updates may seem ordinary, “the running stream of content gives participants a general sense of those around them. In doing so, participants get the sense of the public constructed by those with whom they connect” (p. 6). Nevertheless, social media platforms differ from one another, and the ways and strategies in which they engage in communication might also vary. The specific communication features of Instagram and Facebook are discussed below.

1.2.2. INSTAGRAM

The case of communication on Instagram cannot be discussed without mentioning the changes that the platform went through. According to Jang et al. (2015), Instagram is a

“photo social application with functions of photo shooting, photo beautifying and sharing” (p. 16). Regardless of the platform’s focus on visual aspects, Instagram’s communication goes beyond visual media. Leaver et al. (2020) explored the history of Instagram and the advancements that enabled the platform to become successful. They highlighted that Instagram offered users immediacy and collective experience and the possibility to comment or like each other’s photos lead to the phenomenon in which photographs served more as a form of communication rather than artistic expression. Leaver et al. stated that Instagram should be seen as a main element within the social media world, which leads to “understanding and mapping visual social media cultures” (p. 2). It is important to understand what are the specific communication features of the platform that enable this form of communication. Referring to the information presented on the official website of Instagram, the platform facilitates numerous forms of communication, including “Reels, Stories, Messenger, Search & Explore, Shopping” (Instagram, 2023). As the main focus of this study is LDRs, only three elements will be discussed, leaving out Search & Explore and Shopping, which are more important for business communication.

According to Menon (2022), Instagram Reels is an integral feature of the platform, which “allow users to record and edit a 15-second or 60-second fun video and share it with friends or other Instagram users” (p. 1). Menon pointed out that Reels are rapidly expanding in the case of video-sharing applications; however, this function remains an understudied phenomenon.

Instagram Stories enable users to share videos and photos that will be only accessible for 24 hours and can be seen by anyone following the user’s account (Instagram, 2023). Previous studies connected this feature to digital storytelling, with the emphasis on the name MyStory, which can reflect the users’ behaviour. Individuals may perceive it as sharing their private, personal story and get to decide if they prefer to be the protagonist or the narrator (Amancio, 2017, p. 15-16). Moreover, there are several distinctions between the main feed and Story feature on Instagram. Kacar (2023) explored this topic from the perspective of self-presentation and defined six primary differences between the ways of content sharing, namely frequency of photo sharing, audience, temporal value, impression management efforts, presented facets of the self, and social approval indicators. It is crucial for this study

to understand how individuals' behaviour differs when it comes to sharing different types of content. As Kacar discussed the differences in content sharing, Trieu and Baym (2020) investigated the reception of social media users, with the emphasis on maintaining interpersonal relations. Their research revealed that the act of observing Stories occasionally conveyed "a signal of attention and interest that fostered relationships" (p. 8).

The messenger feature, also called Instagram Direct, can be seen as a dominant feature for communication, which encompasses numerous functions. It enables users to send private messages, including textual and visual content, to selected friends or groups. There is also a possibility to share posts via direct message function, which are available to the public (Boulos et al., 2016). The Messenger's updates introduced in recent years offer convenient forms of communication and ways of expressing thoughts and feelings. As stated by the platform, each user is encouraged to "use message effects, custom reactions, stickers, gifs, polls, and... customize... chat background with colors and themes" (Instagram, 2023). Furthermore, in 2018 there was a new feature introduced, namely video chat, which is available on Instagram Direct. Adjustment of the video functions can be perceived as a significant enhancement compared to competitors, since the platform incorporated the feature, which was already available on other social media platforms. On top of that, it became possible to minimize the video chat and locate it in the corner of the screen, which allowed users to multitask during video conversations (Joffe, 2018).

1.2.3. FACEBOOK

According to Hunt et al. (2012), Facebook is a social platform, which provides users with the opportunity to employ a range of features specifically created for communication between users. It encourages individuals to "spend their time browsing through other users' posts and profiles, liking or commenting on posts, or simply updating their own profiles" (p. 188). Moreover, there are several communication tools on Facebook which encourage interpersonal communication, namely "the wall, status, events... chat, groups and like functionality" (Davies et al., 2016, p. 55). As explained by the authors, the wall is a space on a user's profile on which both user and friends can share content such as thoughts or photos. Status allows friends to know about the user's location, current mood, relationship

status, and other thoughts. The events tool allows users to organize gatherings or activities, and to send out invitations and the agenda of the event. Direct communication with other users is enabled by the chat feature, otherwise known as Messenger, while groups gather users with similar interests and can be seen as an online space for them to participate in debates and exchange various types of content. Lastly, the possibility to like someone else's photo, thoughts, or status give users the opportunity to leave feedback and show appreciation of specific content (Davies et al., 2016). Besides the general communication features available for Facebook users, it is important to mention the specific characteristics of Messenger and its possibilities for enabling communication. According to the official website of Messenger, this tool "has everything you need to feel closer to your favourite people" (Meta, 2024, para. 1) and its main features include "video chat, custom reactions, animated effects, chat themes, replies and forwarding, app lock" (Meta, 2024). As explained by Meta (2024), video chat allows users to make a video call, as well as watch audio-visual content together such as movies, TV series or music clips. Custom reactions are based on advanced functions of previously mentioned 'netspeak' (Tupamahu et al., 2023). Facebook users can customize their choice of emoji language and choose their favourite emojis as an immediate reaction to messages. Animated effects and chat themes are the visual functions which enable users to choose the background for their chat and make it fully personal. Moreover, animated effects allow users to edit their photos and reactions into stickers and other forms of netspeak. The feature of replies and forwarding sustains the flow of the conversation, by letting users choose a specific message to which they want to reply or react. App lock, the last feature, allows users to feel safe and secure. This function allows users to lock their conversations and protect it with a password, fingerprint, or face scan (Meta, 2024).

1.3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND FORMATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

boyd (2010) studied various aspects of social network sites, employing an ethnographic perspective. Through this examination, the author came to the conclusion that social network sites can be perceived as "networked publics", considering multiple practices that unfold within these virtual spaces. boyd argued that networked publics refer to publics that undergo the process of reconstruction through the influence of networked technologies and can be seen as "the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined

collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (p. 1). Lenhart (2015) investigated the role of social media in teens’ friendship, emphasizing its integration into daily interactions. Her research showed that Facebook and Instagram were the two leading social media platforms used by teens to connect with new friends and maintain existing relationships. In addition, 94% of teens spend time with friends on mentioned platforms, and more than 80% of them think that “social media better connects them to their friends’ feelings and lives” (para. 2). Considering romantic relationships, two-third of adults in marriages or committed relationships state that smartphones and social media platforms, such as Facebook, are essential aspects of their daily routine. Moreover, “social media can aid relationships by making it easier for partners to integrate their once-disconnected social networks” (National University, 2024, para. 2). The authors explained that social media feeds, presenting partners together, create the feeling of an icebreaker when it comes to face-to-face meetings. People who have seen the person on a partner’s profile can have the impression of closer connection than they would feel to a stranger.

Another study explored the influence of Instagram’s visuality on the alteration of interpersonal relationships among users. The findings show that while visual social relationships may not provide diverse verbal communication mechanisms, they promote offline meetings or transitioning to other social media platforms (Serafinelli, 2017). When it comes to relationship visibility, the number of partners who decide to display information about their relationships on social media platforms is significant (Hughes et al., 2021). According to Hughes et al., this decision is based on relationship satisfaction and the level of commitment and the authors highlighted the contribution of Facebook and Instagram platforms, which are commonly used to share information about relationship status. Hughes et al. found that around 70% of individuals report posting a Facebook status related to their romantic relationship, “while Instagram boasts nearly 22 million posts with the hashtag #couplegoals” (p. 1042). Considering a more general perspective, Vogels and Anderson (2020) pointed out that nearly 30% of all social media users have talked on these platforms about their love life. Predictably, young adults aged 18 to 29 years old are more likely to share details about their romantic life on social media. Approximately 50% of individuals belonging to this demographic group posted about their love life, while only 11% of people 50 years old or older engaged in similar practices (Vogels & Anderson, 2020). These

differences can be also seen in the trends on social media. The trend report released by Meta in 2023 states that relationships is one of the leading trends recently being visible on Facebook and Instagram. According to the report, “people are putting their whole journeys out there, whether they’re going on a blind date or declaring their love... celebrating life’s moments, looking to the stars for guidance, leveraging new tech to feel closer” (p. 17). The number of people engaging in conversations about their intimate relationships continues to increase in comparison to previous years (Meta Foresight, 2023).

1.4. SOCIAL MEDIA IN LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

Modern relationships “are no longer confined to people living in the same village... Instead, the networks of people are dispersed and loosely knit, and many relationships are maintained with the help of... new communication technologies” (Utz, 2007, p. 695). Nearly a quarter of people who are internet users and involved in recent romantic experience, “have used the internet or email to maintain a long-distance romantic relationship” (Pew Research Center, 2013, para. 6). At a time when geographically distant partners are separated because of pursuing education, professional/economic reasons, or personal opportunities (Clark & Mass, 2015), understanding how social media influence the dynamics of LDRs becomes crucial. Gutzmann (2018) focused his research on distant romantic partners and utilization of social media. His findings show that social media platforms serve as means of communication and enable partners to “connect instantaneously with ease” (p. 51). In addition, Gutzmann strongly emphasized the impact of Facebook, which, according to distant partners, played a crucial role in maintaining the feeling of connectedness between them.

Expanding the discussion, it is necessary to investigate which forms and tools of communication are commonly used among individuals engaged in LDR. Drawing from recent findings, the prevailing methods used to communicate with a partner in LDRs are “phone, text message, and video call,” indicating that participants chose the methods that “allow for immediate feedback and interaction with a partner” (Belus et al., 2018, p. 89). These methods are fully enabled by the features of Facebook and Instagram, which can potentially bring attention to these platforms in terms of LDR analysis.

Given the growing prevalence of LDRs, especially among young adults (Goldsmith & Byers, 2018), there are numerous dimensions of communication maintenance that have been previously discussed by scholars. Nevertheless, Merolla (2012) highlights that there are several aspects of LDRs and their mediation that remain understudied. The author expresses the need for further analysis of themes such as trust, replacement of face-to-face communication, or online sexual maintenance.

1.4.1. TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Subramanian (2017) explored the topic of social media from a sociological perspective. He discovered that social media platforms have a vast influence on people's lifestyles and the manner in which they engage in interpersonal communication. Progressive technology, the use of tech devices and their convenience led to the relegation of face-to-face interactions, and a shift towards impersonal ones. There are several factors impacting this shift and one of the most important is trust. Surprisingly, the author argues that "when we communicate through social media, we tend to trust the people on the other end of the communication, so our messages tend to be more open" (Subramanian, 2017, p. 70). Nevertheless, Subramanian highlighted the risks associated with authenticity and he questions where the boundary of trust should be drawn.

Trust and privacy have been extensively debated in the literature. Tang and Liu (2015) delved into the topic of defining trust, and emphasized that the definitions vary according to the disciplinary perspectives. In the context of this study, priority is given to definitions within data science and computational science, which cover two main things, namely "interpersonal trust" and "trust networks" (Tang & Liu, 2015, p. 4-5). The first form of trust explains the interconnection between two users, while trust networks refers to the representation of interpersonal trust within online activities. Kim and Ahmad (2013) explored the topic of trust within social media-sharing communities and their findings indicate that trust is a central factor in sustaining desired social interactions in these groups, at the same time emphasizing the importance of content evaluation made by users.

Nonetheless, Yacoub et al. (2018) discussed the topic of relationship trust within the social media context. In accordance with their research, social media enables users to connect with their ex-partners, friends of their current partners, and potentially new individuals that they might find attractive. These possibilities may lead to certain emotions, including “distrust, jealousy, and doubt in relationships that would have otherwise been unaffected” (p. 55). As evidence of this phenomena, Vogels and Anderson (2020) report that 70% of young adults acknowledge using social media to monitor people they were previously involved with romantically. In addition, almost a quarter of individuals in committed relationships, whose partners actively use social media, have experienced feelings of jealousy or uncertainty concerning their relationship due to “the way their current spouse or partner interacts with other people on social media” (Vogels & Anderson, 2020, para. 11).

1.4.2. MAINTAINING SEXUAL ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIP

Merolla (2012) suggests that people in LDRs are more likely to participate in the activities associated with relationship maintenance compared to those in geographically close relationships. This behaviour has its basis in the need to surmount obstacles and the willingness to achieve comparable satisfaction levels to non-distant partners. Elaborating on this argument, Goldsmith and Byers (2018) propose that partners in LDRs are more inclined to participate in sexual maintenance behaviour. In addition, the authors point out that “due to increased pining for or longing to be with their romantic partner but less frequent physical accessibility, it is likely that individuals in LDRs fantasize about their partner more frequently... and engage more frequently in sexual activity” (p. 342). The findings of their study also indicate that 33% of interviewees in LDR participated in sexual activities online to maintain their relationship quality.

Neustaedter and Greenberg (2012) explored the role of video chat in sustaining intimacy among distant partners. Their research distinguished three specific acts performed by individuals, which contribute to the level of intimacy, namely hugging and kissing, going to bed/falling asleep, sexual activities and nudity (p. 759-760). The first two categories contribute to the feeling of partners’ co-presence through the mimicking of physical interactions via video chat or observing the partner falling asleep. The last category concerns

the exchange of sexual content and participating in sexual activities with the partner on the camera. Nevertheless, the authors highlight that for several individuals creating intimacy “is difficult to gain over a video channel because there is a lack of true physicality between partners” (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2012, p. 761).

Another way to maintain sexual satisfaction in a LDR is sexting. Adell (2023) defined this phenomenon as “sexual expression, which involves sending sexually explicit images, videos, and photos digitally or on social media” (p. 2). Beckmeyer et al. (2021) discovered that sexting has the capability to enhance the stability and satisfaction among distant partners. Moreover, sexting can prevent partners from seeking intimacy elsewhere since it maintains the interest of the distant partner.

1.4.3. SENSE OF PARTNER’S PRESENCE (SOCIAL PRESENCE THEORY)

Biocca et al. (2003) defined social presence theory as the sensation of being together with other individuals within the virtual world. The authors added that “these others that we experience are primarily technologically mediated representations” (p. 1). Elaborating further, Shen et al. (2006) analysed the connection between social presence theory and virtual communities. According to them, a virtual community differs from a physical one in a way that technological mediation shapes the psychological experience of the places and society within the virtual environment. The authors mentioned previously conducted studies and stated that communication media can be categorized based on “their potential to communicate socio-emotional cues in such a way that the other person in the communication is perceived as “physically” present” (p. 4462). Other research focused on the categorization of social presence and identifies three main types of this phenomenon, namely “awareness... affective social presence... and cognitive social presence” (Shen & Khalifa, 2009). In the context of online interactions, awareness is defined as the degree to which other social actors are perceived by users. In order to increase the awareness, users rely on indicators such as online/offline status change, location, and elements such as photos and avatars. Another way to cultivate awareness within online communities is presence in online discussions and posting. Secondly, affective social presence considers emotional aspects within online space. As stated by the authors, “people do not think about being present in the real world—they

feel that they are” (p. 37) since the presence of emotions is essential for one to feel immersed in the virtual environment. Lastly, “cognitive social presence refers to the belief about the users’ relationship with others and the social context” (p. 37), in other words, users have to understand the context offered by the online environment to be able to participate in it.

For the purposes of this study, it is essential to understand how social media, as the representation of the virtual world, facilitate the feeling of others’ presence within the relationship context. Gooch and Watts (2014) argue that, in the situation where individuals live separately, their lasting emotions towards their partner or friend are molded by their participation in communication activities. The authors highlight that not every type of personal relationship can be presumed to benefit from online communication in the same way. Moreover, different technologies and the ways individuals utilize them can have different impacts on different relationships, as mentioned by the authors, “some may facilitate a presence that is welcome where others may serve to generate a consciousness of the other person that is difficult to manage” (p. 2). Nonetheless, people in LDRs are one of the groups qualified under Gooch and Watts’ study and the communication between partners rely often on social media platforms since they can create the feeling of a partner’s co-presence. Similarly, Greenberg and Neustaedter (2013) found that couples in LDRs frequently use video chatting while participating in other activities. Multitasking allows partners to engage in daily activities, at the same time running a conversation with their distant partner. According to the authors, this type of behaviour enhances online co-presence and sustains the feeling of intimacy.

2. RELATIONSHIPS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

2.1. DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

The term *relationship* can be simply defined as a phenomenon in which two individuals depend on each other. It is a sequence of connected events, each of which is affected by previous occurrences, leading to an impact on current and future interactions (Blumstein & Kollock, 1988). Forgas and Dobosz (1980) proposed that relationships between humans usually adhere to norms defined by specific cultures. In other words, individuals who are a part of a specific culture have a general idea of the relationship models prevalent in their social environment. In addition, those individuals, while in the process of forming new connections, are predisposed to “define their emerging contacts with others in terms of relationship repertoire at their disposal” (p. 290). In line with this argument, Parks (2017) states that the majority of people perceive their personal relationships as inherently private; however, it is crucial to acknowledge that our closest relationships possess both public and personal dimensions. These relationships are directly linked to broader societal matters that exceed private concerns and are visible within areas such as the economic sphere, social services, or healthcare. Yet, the prevailing perspective within society indicates that individuals perceive their close relationships as central sources of happiness and meaning in their lives. As mentioned by Parks, “we humans are social animals down to our very cells” (p. 1) and personal relationships play a unique role in enriching our quality of life, surpassing the contribution of other factors, such as career or social status.

2.1.1. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Considering the categorization of relationships, VanLear et al. (2006) point out that in order to assign a relationship to a specific category, it is essential to understand the difference between personal and social relationships. As shown in Table 1, the types of relationships can be divided into personal and social, as well as voluntary and exogenously established. VanLear et al. (2006) mentioned that personal relationships are characterised by intimacy, closeness, and interdependency, and this type of relationship usually exists between an individual and his/her closest friends, romantic partners, or family members. On the contrary, social relationships are marked by the absence of a similar level of intimacy and

interdependence compared to personal relationships, yet occasionally fulfilling the needs of one another. Another factor influencing the segmentation of relationships can be determined by voluntariness, namely whether or not the formation of the relationship happened voluntarily. This study will primarily focus on personal relationships.

Table 2 Relationship Typologies (Chapter 6) The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships.

	Personal Relations	Social Relations
Voluntary	Marriage Best Friends Cohabiting Couple Adoptive/Foster Family	Acquaintances Casual Friends Relational Marketing
Exogenously Established	Parent–Child Siblings Grandparent–Child	Distant Relatives Work Relationships Monopoly Provider–Client

Perlman and Vangelisti (2018) state that personal relationships “have a holistic quality” (p. 2) since they encompass various types of relationships, even the most intimate ones. The authors highlight the importance of studying personal relationships within the academic environment and mention that the majority of individuals spend their lives in the companionship of significant others, collaboratively coexisting, achieving common goals, and planning future steps. Moreover, personal relationships influence the general well-being of individuals, having a positive impact on “happiness, mental health, physical health, and even longevity” (p. 2).

According to Hathaway and Lawson (2024), the definition of personal relationships is subjective and varies from one person to another, yet it generally entails a sense of connectedness, particularly on an emotional level. Moreover, this type of relationship is characterised by close bonds and interactions, which are often developed and strengthened by shared experiences. The authors proposed the model of personal relationships, which distinguished three main types of personal relationships, namely family, friends, and romantic partnerships.

Blumstein and Kollock (1988) delineated a distinction between close and personal relationships. According to the authors, close relationships are defined by intense interdependence involving strong, regular, and diverse interactions over a long period of time. In addition, the authors pointed out that those relationships are characterised by the presence of positive and intense emotions, which are the main factors distinguishing a close relationship from one that holds either formal or marginal significance. On the contrary, the authors argue that personal relationships are attributed with an additional layer of interdependences. It can simply be proved by the fact that a close relationship progresses to a personal one, rather than vice versa. The transition from close to personal relationship is marked by addressing expectations of one another. Furthermore, personal relationships differ from each other, depending on the unique characteristics of individuals engaged in such relationships. As stated by Blumstein and Kollock (1988), “personal relationships are relationships between unique individuals that would lose their particular character if one of the participants were replaced” (p. 470).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that several scholars approached the definition of relationships from different perspectives. Therefore, despite the distinction made by Blumstein & Kollock (1988) between *close* and *personal* relationships, there are numerous studies that introduce the concept of *close personal* relationships, or *deep personal* relationship. Hooker (2021) points out that defining the terminology of relationships is an important aspect since some personal relationships can be shallow, less significant, or may simply last for a very short period of time. Those relationships that are based on “a multifaceted understanding of each other’s personality and character” (p. 2) and “strong affection for one another” (p. 4) are defined by Hooker (2021) as *deep personal* relationships. Expanding on his previous findings, Hooker (2022) stated that the level of commitment required for deep personal relationships may not always be explicit or consciously recognised, leading to an even harder distinction between certain human relationships. The author argues that these relationships in particular involve certain configurations within our hearts, minds, and emotions, which may not be consciously acknowledged. Nevertheless, he emphasised that the types of connections that can be classified as *deep personal* relationships are “romantic ones... deep friendships and some familial relationships” (p. 346). In contrast, Newey (2022), responding to Hooker’s argument, believes that such relationships do not

necessarily have to be fully based on deep personal affection; however, this feeling may occasionally emerge. The author referred to the same types of connections as Hooker, such as romantic ones or friendship, but added that in the absence of the mentioned affection such relationships can be described as *close personal* relationships. More importantly, the author stated that *close personal* relationships are characterised by “the ability to generate legitimate and reasonable expectations of one or other party, or both” (Newey , 2022, p. 314).

2.1.2. ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Dietrich (2016) noted that from young adulthood onward, romantic relationships play an important role in people’s lives. The presence of romance is visible in society and evident in cultural narratives. All these cultural details combined, such as media products, lead to individuals’ aspirations “to find a romantic partner” (p. 1). Modzelewski (2016) tried to define romantic relationships and suggests that this type of relationships is based on three main components: intimacy, passion, and a commitment to maintain the relationship. Furthermore, he highlighted that each of these elements might vary in its intensity, and sometimes, a deficit of one of them may occur.

In the view of Viejo et al. (2015), love is the main feeling that distinguishes romantic relationships from others, not simply by saying that this emotion occurs only between romantic partners, but due to the fact that different types of love indicate the kind of relationship people are engaged in. In addition, the authors emphasised that couples experience love in three distinct forms, namely “love towards those whose well-being is our priority; love towards those who depend on us; and love which includes passion, desire for intimacy and physical closeness, emotional and sexual longing with someone who makes us feel special” (p. 1219). Nevertheless, the authors highlight that the concept of love is a quite recent academic concern, and there are several different approaches towards this idea. One of them is the focus on well-being and happiness, since the majority of studies show that love has a positive impact on the aforementioned factors. According to Viejo et al. (2015), “loving and feeling loved seem to be key elements in relation to well-being” (p. 1220).

Fletcher et al. (2015) approached the topic of love from the perspective of couple formation and how individuals seek out romantic partners. The authors suggest that the type of love

experienced between romantic partners is *romantic love*, which naturally differs from familial, platonic, and other forms of love. They point out that romantic love is undeniably the primary motivation driving individuals to form couples and engage in romantic relationships. Furthermore, the authors propose that romantic love has three distinct factors, namely “passion, intimacy, and caregiving” (p. 22). When all the aforementioned conditions are met, the type of love in question may be considered a “powerful commitment device...associated with pair-bonding across cultures” (p. 22).

Tartakovsky (2023) defined romantic relationships as “those based on the emotional and physical attraction” (p. 1) and his study revolves around the topic of motivations behind couple formation. The author suggests that the selection of a romantic partner is influenced by the individual’s motivational objectives. In other words, people seek partners who can best facilitate the achievement of their motivational goals. His findings validated the presence of four distinct groups of romantic motivations, namely “love and care, family and children, status and resources, and sex and adventure” (p. 15). The author called these groups “clusters (higher-order romantic motivations)” (p. 6) and highlighted that each cluster includes a set of specific motivations to engage in romantic relationships.

Another text (Communication, 2016) takes a more direct approach to delineating the categorization of romantic relationships. As most prior research has traditionally classified such relationships into premarital and marital, they suggest a classification encompassing dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples. The classification for dating couples includes the initial phase of courtship, from the first date to possibly several years afterwards. As they decide to live together, couples are classified as cohabitating. Partnered couples, on the other hand, solidify their commitment through additional arrangements, such as legal formalization, which proves their long-term commitment (Communication, 2016¹). In contrast, Zielony-Koryczan (2020) argues that, in recent times, non-traditional forms of romantic relationships have gained popularity as alternatives to marriage. These include so-called “living apart together” (p. 131) relationships, in which partners maintain a committed relationships while residing separately. The author explains that the reason for this is that individuals in informal relationships see the superiority of such an arrangement in the

voluntary nature of staying with their partners. Moreover, they perceive love as the main reason for being together, rather than the form of contract represented by marriage.

2.1.3. LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

According to Pistole et al. (2010), LDRs are those in which individuals choose to reside in different geographical locations, often due to career or educational pursuits. Partners engaged in this type of relationship periodically come together for reunions, before parting once again. Kelmer et al. (2013) expanded on the factors that may lead to geographical separation between romantic partners, including “military service or deployment, incarceration, immigration restrictions, and parental or familial obligations” (p. 257). Additionally, the authors mentioned that it is commonly believed that LDRs are prone to failure, since geographical distance might present various challenges. On the contrary, at the very beginning of her study, Sahlstein (2004) cited the popular sayings: “*Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Out of sight, out of mind*” (p. 689). The author proposes that these two sayings imply two potential perspectives on LDRs. The first one suggests that affection grows due to physical separation, while the other indicates that physical absence may foster a sense of comfortable independence. The author explains that living separately can increase the level of stress and induce feelings of loneliness. Yet cohabitation is not always feasible, since maintaining a relationship from a distance can sustain “partners’ freedoms that they would not have if they lived in close proximity” (p. 690). Similarly, Haandrikman (2019) noted that currently, the significance of geographical proximity in selecting partners may have diminished as a result of “substantial increases in social and spatial mobility, individual affluence, educational participation, travel abroad, and, not least, the use of the internet” (p. 441). In addition, the scholar argues that globalization is the main factor contributing to this change, implying a world where physical distance is irrelevant, individuals are not tied to specific locations, and societies rely on connection through networks.

Considering statistical data, previous research indicates that 62% of Americans had experienced LDRs, with 11% of participants being in this type of relationship for at least five years (Harris Poll, 2016). According to a study published by the New York Post, 60% of LDRs lead to enduring success (Schmall, 2018). Harris and Edwards (2014) argue that LDRs are frequent and increasing in numbers, yet they remain an understudied phenomenon

due to a widespread belief among the public and scholars that this type of relationship is lacking essential factors, which lead to the success of relationship. Similarly, Krapf (2016) states that it is challenging to gauge the number of long-distance couples because “most surveys do not contain information on distance” (p. 315) and “the definition of what constitutes a long distance differs across studies” (p. 315-316).

2.2. CHANGING DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIPS

2.2.1. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Gamble and Gamble (2013) define interpersonal communication as “the ongoing, ever-changing process that occurs when one person interacts with another person, forming a dyad; communication occurring within a relationship” (p. 3) and highlight that the way in which people communicate delineates the nature of the relationship they are engaged in. The authors created a list of seven fundamental components of interpersonal communication, which is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The Essential Elements of Interpersonal Communication. Chapter 1 Interpersonal Communication: Building Connections Together.

People	The senders and receivers of communication messages
Messages	The content of communication
Channels	The media through which messages travel
Noise	Interference with the ability to send or receive messages
Feedback	Information received in exchange for messages
Context	The environmental, situational, or cultural setting in which communication takes place
Effect	The results of a communication episode

The first component describes the participants, who communicate with each other and perform at the same time, what is called *a role duality*. The second defines content, which can be either spoken or gestural. In this case the authors pointed out that “messages can be conveyed through any one of our five senses: auditory, visual, gustatory, olfactory, or tactile” (p. 8), and some of the messages might be more intimate, directed to a specific receiver. Consequently, the messages are conveyed through specific channels, which differ whether

occurring through face-to-face communication, or a non-physical medium, such as the internet or phone. Noise can be seen as a distractor that diminishes communication by creating obstacles that hinder an individual's capacity to transmit or receive a message. Feedback is the information that individuals participating in communication obtain in reaction to the message they have conveyed. The sixth element, context, refers to the settings in which the communication takes place. Gamble and Gamble (2013) explained that context can be either environmental or situational. The first one signifies "the physical location of the interaction" (p. 11), while the second "comprises the life spaces or cultural backgrounds of the parties in the dyad" (p. 11). Lastly, effect represents the outcome of the communication. It can be perceived as an impact on another, at the same time pointing out that every individual might experience this stage differently, with personal level of intensity.

According to Caughlin (2010), the purpose of interpersonal communication goes beyond behavioural interactions or information exchanges. It is typically marked by a strategic approach, which involves actions such as providing comfort, offering advice, or even persuading others. In connection to relationships, the author highlights that communication also functions as a tool to "manage one's own and one's partner's identity" (p. 826), as it is aimed at attaining specific communication goals. Another study (Communication, 2016) points out that the foundations of relationships are being constructed through ordinary dialogues and seemingly insignificant exchanges, which are navigated by individuals as a part of relating process. The ability to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of relationships relies on communication, specifically considering that people involved in relationships often possess different expectations. Nevertheless, the author mentions that "it is also through communication that we respond when someone violates or fails to meet those expectations" (Communication, 2016, p. 334). Similarly, Vangelisti (2002) states that "interpersonal communication is central to romantic relationships" (p. 597). According to the author, the importance of communication is visible at every stage of relationships. Starting from the beginning, the initial interaction between two individuals can either spark or dampen the prospects for future romantic involvement. While involved in a romantic relationship, communication is linked to a couple's perceptions of each other and their sentiments regarding their relationship. Lastly, communication can ultimately dictate the continuation or end of a relationship.

2.2.2. ONLINE AND OFFLINE COMMUNICATION

Previous studies suggest that the primary difference between face-to-face and digital communication with a partner is the absence of non-verbal cues. It has been observed that explicit verbal communication is intertwined with numerous non-verbal signals, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation. In other words, communication that doesn't occur face-to-face, it may lead to a lack of understating when it comes to specific situations, such as reading the feelings of the other person or misunderstanding the context of a message (Wałęcka-Matyja & Dębska, 2023).

Baym (2015) argued that the current era offers an array of communication channels that were not known before and people tend to consistently develop novel technologies, which facilitate interaction. The traditional forms of communication have been accompanied by “email, mobile phone calls, text messaging, instant messaging, chat, web board, social networks, photo sharing, video sharing, multiplayer gaming, and more” (Baym, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of the digitalization of communication within the context of relationships, and points out two distinct approaches towards this topic visible in society. The first approach presents people's anxiety about the increased superficiality of communication posing a potential challenge to the well-being of individuals involved in personal relationships. On the contrary, the other position expresses the positive impact of new technologies, which include the potential to provide convenient connections with individuals and foster stronger and more varied relationships. According to the author, “both perspectives reflect a sense that digital media are changing the nature of our social connections” (p. 1).

Lieberman and Schroeder (2020) analysed differences between face-to-face and digital interactions within a social context. The authors suggested four fundamental structural variances between both types of interactions; compared to face-to-face interaction, online interactions offer “(1) fewer nonverbal cues, (2) greater potential for anonymity, (3) more opportunity to form new social ties and to bolster existing weak ties, and (4) wider dissemination of information” (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020, p. 16). Firstly, the authors mentioned that the majority of face-to-face encounters rely on nonverbal cues, such as gestures, tone of voice or facial expressions, which are not present in several online

interactions. This absence of nonverbal cues results in two significant implications, namely “it can reduce people’s understanding of others’ thoughts and feelings” (p. 17) and it “makes the communicator appear less mentally capable - less thoughtful and emotional” (p. 17). Nevertheless, the authors highlight that their comparison between online and offline interactions is based solely on messaging/reading text messages, and it does not cover other ways of communicating online, such as recording voice messages or video calls.

In connection to anonymity, Lieberman and Schroeder (2020) mention that it can fuel social conflict and hinder meaningful social connections since discrete interactions are characterised by reduced accountability. On the contrary, they argue that the emergence of the internet has simplified communication on a global scale, overcoming geographical limitations, and facilitating the convenient expansion of social connections. Lastly, Lieberman and Schroeder (2020) emphasise that the ease and accessibility of sharing content online surpass traditional mass media channels and enable individuals to reach broader audiences, noting “many individuals can access a significantly larger audience more easily and quickly online than offline” (p. 17).

Keep et al. (2012) examined the differences of disclosing oneself in online and offline environment. The authors defined self-disclosure as “the voluntary and verbal communication of personal information to a targeted recipient” (p. 103). Their study was based on the analysis of previously conducted surveys and experiments and their findings show that four out of six experimental studies found increased disclosure in the online environment. In contrast, among the nine survey studies, only one found higher levels of online disclosure, while six identified increased disclosure in face-to-face interactions. Another study (Greene et al., 2006) points out that self-disclosure can affect the choice of the type of relationship that individuals want to create with another person, when they decide to disclose information. The disclosure of information will vary depending on the connection to the person receiving information. Moreover, the authors argue that self-disclosure is crucial in order to foster intimacy within romantic relationships and it “was positively associated with self-reports of love (focusing on feelings of attachment, caring, and intimacy)” (Greene et al., 2006, p. 416).

In connection to LDR's, Zebua and Kartikawati (2023) mentioned that mediated forms of interpersonal communication are essential for couples engaged in this particular type of relationship. The authors highlighted that interpersonal communication utilizes specific mediums for conveying the messages and these mediums have diversified, serving as "channels of interpersonal communication" (p. 34). Correspondingly, the study of Kolozsvari (2015) suggests that distant partners encounter a very specific challenge in defining and affirming their relationship, as they are separated from one another. Since being involved in a romantic relationship is commonly described as 'being together', long-distant partners tend to use language and symbols to define the parameters of their connection, bridging the divide between 'being together' and 'being apart'. More importantly, Kolozsvari (2015) argues that distant partners share a specific kind of space, which can be seen as non-physical space that they construct together. The findings of his research indicate that for many individuals this shared space exists in cyberspace, as it "can help bridge any real or perceived gaps between distance and closeness and generate a feeling of togetherness and belonging despite physical distances" (p. 112). Kacprzak (2015) adds that, in the case of romantic partners, online communication serves to coordinate meetings in the offline world, solidify relationships, maintain contact, and prevent relationship breakdown. The author highlights that digital tools enable individuals to create the feeling of being together, even in moments when physical distance is not an occasional issue but a persistent obstacle.

2.2.2.1. THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE COMMUNICATION

Bolander and Locher (2020) investigated the socio-cultural perspective of the online and offline realms and argued that most individuals perceive them as interconnected rather than separated notions. As explained by the authors, "the online is instead seen as an 'extension' of offline interactions" (p. 2). Slater (2002) observed that the majority of scholars tend to compare online and offline interactions based on an odd contrast between computer mediated communication and face-to-face communication. However, he highlighted that this oversimplification fails to capture the complexity of the phenomenon because "new media exist within a far wider mediascape that already blurs the online/offline distinction" (p. 543). In line with his argument, de Souza e Silva (2006) focused her research on the perception of space in online and offline environments. She introduced the concept of *hybrid spaces*,

which are defined as “mobile spaces, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and other users” (p. 262). The constant connection to the internet, as people navigate urban environments, alters how they perceive space. According to the author, this connection encompasses both social interactions and access to online information, at the same time merging people’s physical and digital experiences. Jordan (2009) argued that this type of hybrid space reflects contemporary society, in which identities established in online and offline spheres can coincide and intersect. In addition, Baym (2009) discussed how online activities create consequences in physical life and vice versa, arguing that “online and offline are not different entities to be contrasted” (p. 721) because the impact of new technologies is directly linked to face-to-face interactions and other forms of traditional media. Moreover, even actions seen as exclusively online are driven by individuals in physical environments. Consequently, the actions that take place offline shape the meaning and outcomes of online practices and the other way around.

Gómez-Urrutia and Tello-Navarro (2021) explored this topic from the perspective of relationships formed among young people. Their study shows that this particular societal group integrates online and offline interactions, even with individuals that they regularly encounter in physical life. The authors said that this generation experiences a sense of delocalization, where technology enables constant communication despite physical distance. Furthermore, it blurs the boundaries between online and offline communication, creating a hybrid network of relationships that reshape spatial and temporal borders.

2.2.3. ONLINE DATING

According to Kwok and Wescott (2020), the emergence of the internet, online social networks, and smartphones has significantly transformed people’s romantic lives, in both positive and negative ways. Those technologies have facilitated changes in mating rituals, at the same time enabling individuals to express their interest or dissatisfaction with a simple message or gesture. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of cyberintimacy, characterised by Kwok and Wescott (2020) as “technology-mediated communication” (p. 657), which has revolutionized methods of connection and interpersonal engagement. Moreover, the authors highlight that meeting potential partners through online connections

has become the third-most common method for individuals to initiate romantic relationships, “with more than one-third of all marriages resulting from connecting online” (p. 657). In line with their findings, a recent Pew Research Center report indicates that 30% of Americans aged 18 and above report having previously utilised a dating website or application (McClain & Gelles-Watnick, 2023). Considering Europe, more than 77 million individuals use free dating applications, and the number of users is predicted to rise (Dixon, 2024).

Rosen et al. (2008) stated that online dating varies significantly from face-to-face dating, emphasizing the fact that the connection between two individuals online occurs at an accelerated pace. This type of connections features early self-disclosure from both sides, while traditional offline dating unfolds at a slower pace and requires increased physical presence. The differences were also visible in the findings of their research, which reveal that, for conventional daters, the most important factors considered in the process of connecting with one another were “personal information, personality, and education” (p. 2153), whereas online daters found “communication style and physical attractiveness” (p. 2153) as the main aspects of promising connection. In addition, their research reveals that the quantity of individuals involved in online dating has been constantly rising, which can be proved by another recent study suggesting that online dating has developed and changed over the past few decades (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Previous research by Lawson & Leck (2006) investigated online dating by delving into the reasons behind individuals’ dating intentions and their perception related to trust issues. The authors interviewed men and women who were practicing internet-based dating. Their findings indicate that the main reasons behind engaging in online dating are escaping from loneliness, finding solace following personal challenges, seeking independence from commitments, craving excitement, and fulfilling their romantic desires. Considering trust, a majority of interviewees reflected some concerns connected to the online environment, however, in their opinion, the gains from online interaction “appeared to outweigh the risks” (p. 206). Zhang (2023) noted that online dating services aim to foster enduring and significant connections, however there are several factors leading to reduce the success of lasting relationships. The author explored three elements that could diminish the effectiveness of utilizing online dating platforms, namely “deceptive nature of online

dating... user's purpose of use... design of the page of the online dating software" (p. 640). The first factor describes the actions of users presenting inaccurate or untrue information on their profiles to enhance their appeal, yet it can undermine trust and hinders the formation of authentic relationships. The second element relates to the intentions of users, since some might be looking for informal interactions or sexual pleasure and could mislead the expectations of other users. Lastly, "the design of many online social software programs magnifies the user's photo and appearance" (p. 640), and can result in prioritization of physical attractiveness over personality traits. This pattern of online dating design deviates from the original purpose of online services, which was to foster genuine connections. Sharabi and Dykstra-De Vette (2019) analysed the switch from online mode to real-life meetings among people romantically engaged in online interactions. According to the authors, online interaction lay a strong foundation for real-life relationships, yet there are several concerns that high expectations set through online interactions can lead to disappointment during face-to-face meetings.

2.2.4. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

The utilization of social media platforms has led to major changes in communication style and certain platforms have become integral in reshaping interpersonal communication dynamics. More importantly, social media provide an option to connect with others worldwide, transforming traditional ways of interacting (Subramanian, 2017).

It is essential to note that social media usage differs across generations. Li et al. (2021) compared the influence of social media usage among various age groups and their findings suggest that young adults are largely engaged with social media platforms, which play an essential role in their lives, while middle-aged adults and seniors can derive advantages from social media but their online presence is less significant to them. Kuczamer-Kłopotowska (2016) argues that what unites all members of Generation Y is their proficiency in using digital technology, which is not just understood as excellent knowledge of technology, but rather as a certain lifestyle. As described by the author, "Generation Y is the first generation growing up in a world filled with computers, cell phones, tablets, smartphones, and internet social networks" (p. 222). Sharma (2022) investigated the usage of social media among students and its influence on interpersonal communication. His research suggests that the

participants exhibit a strong attachment to social media, prioritizing this type of interaction over face-to-face communication. His study also reveals the importance of mobile devices since the majority of students limited their social media usage to smartphone applications. In addition, chat and text messaging were preferred over phone calls, which indicate the superiority of digital communication methods. Sharma (2022) concluded his study by stating that “there is a need for people to be socially associated; in modern times, they do it through social media” (p. 28).

Earlier investigations suggest that the emergence of new media influences individuals’ self-perception through the online depiction of one’s personal life, which includes sharing images, disclosing personal milestones, and personal interactions. The continual connection to the internet, which is often reflected through the utilization of social media, fosters relationships by creating a sense of solidified bonds. Moreover, social media play a significant role in the formation of interpersonal connections by introducing new criteria for relationships, “such as ‘being Facebook friends” (Communication, 2016). Wong et al. (2017) argued that the feedback received from other users on social media can significantly impact human behaviour. The authors perceive these platforms as a space for interactions, which consist of sharing content and connecting with others, nevertheless it can be also seen as a space for opinion exchange. Consequently, social media have the potential to alter both parties’ perspectives, decisions, and actions.

Delle (2021) explored the topic of social media in connection to romantic relationships and argued that social networking sites have expanded their impact, shifting relationships to be primarily accessed and managed online. Delle (2021) points out that there are several perspectives on this topic and the risks associated with social media usage cannot be neglected. In addition, the author noted that prior literature presents numerous inconsistent findings, which can indicate both positive and negative effects on romantic relationships. This can be depicted through the example of Facebook, which “in some seminal studies... was associated with conflict, whereas other studies found that high Facebook use was associated with relationship satisfaction” (p. 8). Yacoub et al. (2018) argued that social media platforms have facilitated romantic connections between individuals who might not have crossed paths otherwise, at the same time including people from various global locations.

Furthermore, the communication has become highly accessible through “mobile phones, video chat applications, messaging applications, and easy photograph sharing options” (p. 53) and it allows partners to engage in conversations regardless of distance.

Considering specific platforms, Instagram enables users to curate and share a digital portrayal of their lives, presenting themselves authentically, or as they aspire to be perceived. Within the context of romantic relationships, this self-presentation prompts considerations regarding the authenticity of their shared content and the authenticity of user’s relationship itself (Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017). Sharabi and Hopkins (2021) observed that, despite its ubiquitous presence, Instagram has been an understudied phenomenon because most studies have focused on other social networking sites, such as Facebook. They investigated the connection between visual features of the Instagram platform and romantic relationship maintenance. The authors pointed out that Instagram impacts individuals’ choices in presenting their relationship, since published posts are visible to their partners and a broader audience. Moreover, partners may embrace the joint couple identity depicted in their posts. Nevertheless, Sharabi and Hopkins (2021) highlighted that Instagram not only offers resources for maintaining relationships but it may pose a threat because it contains appealing alternatives for individuals, including potential options for partners beyond their current relationship. Fox et al. (2013) mentioned that social media poses the power not only to communicate with a romantic partner, but also to communicate the love between partners to the world. People have always communicated their relationships to the public, even before the emergence of the internet, however social networking sites facilitate the dissemination of such information more conveniently and on a larger scale. As mentioned by the authors, “the nature of Facebook gives network members unprecedented access to information about a romantic involvement, including declared relationship status, photographs, social commentary, and even communication between partners” (Fox et al., 2013, p. 772). Stewart et al. (2014) investigated how partners use Facebook depending on two different aspects of their relationship. Firstly, the results of their study demonstrate that when partners felt insecure about their relationship, they were more likely to monitor each other’s online activities. Secondly, if they were confident about their future together, they focused more on offering reassurance and being open about their relationship on Facebook.

2.2.4.1. SMARTPHONES

Machado et al. (2023) defined smartphones as devices that are commonly utilized by a majority of people worldwide to record significant moments, access information, connect with others, and disseminate content. Marino et al. (2021) analysed the connection between smartphones and social media usage and mentioned that the two inventions share a common ground since mobile devices can be perceived as a medium to facilitate social media usage. The scholars pointed out that the contemporary culture is characterised by the prevalent and widespread usage of smartphones and social media, “with about 66% of the world’s total population owning a mobile phone and about 53% accessing social media apps” (Marino, et al., 2021, p. 469). More importantly, the findings of their study suggest a significant link between smartphone usage and Facebook and Instagram usage. According to the authors, heavy smartphone use often goes hand in hand with frequent use of the two applications.

In connection to romantic relationships, Lapierre et al. (2020) conducted research on young couples and their study found that mobile device usage is directly linked to more frequent interactions among couples, and it leads to warmer and more emotional forms of communication. On the contrary, relying too much on smartphone and excessive usage was closely connected to relationship dissatisfaction. In line with this argument, a recent report found that nearly 40% of adults occasionally feel concerned about the time their partner dedicates to their smartphone. In addition, 50% of individuals in a relationship reported that their partner is distracted by their mobile device when they attempt to engage in conversation (Pew Research Center, 2020).

2.2.4.2. TEXT-BASED COMMUNICATION

Text messaging and instant messaging are sometimes mistaken for the same phenomenon. Yet, text messaging is enabled through the mobile phone services, while instant messaging uses the internet (PCMag, 2024) and can be accessed through various social media platforms (Baucas & Spachos, 2024). Previous studies indicate that people tend to use text messages and instant messaging interchangeably, and additionally, they fail to perceive the differences in these two forms of communication. As an example, survey respondents perceived Facebook Messenger as “extremely similar to texting” (Bailey et al., 2016, p. 1237).

Pettigrew (2009) interviewed people engaged in close personal relationships and investigated their perceptions of text messaging. The results of his study found that numerous couples emphasised the importance of texting in fostering a sense of connection. To a large extent, participants appreciated the constant connectivity and the freedom to reach out whenever needed. In addition, partners found text messaging useful in situations where verbal communication was not possible, providing additional opportunities to connect. Lastly, one of the interviewees pointed out that texting helps them to stay updated throughout the day, allowing for the quick exchange of the messages to get informed about their partner's whereabouts.

Slatcher et al. (2008) argued that instant messaging is characterised by “visual and vocal anonymity” (p. 410), which allows individuals to sustain emotional expressions more effectively than face-to-face communication. The authors looked at the topic of romantic relationships and instant messaging from the linguistic perspective and analysed the words used by couples on platforms providing exchange of the messages. Their findings show that the language employed by couples correlates with the durability and quality of their relationship and it indicates associations between word choice and partner's commitment. The results also suggest that partners who are not fully satisfied with their relationship are likely to use words which describe negative feelings “sarcastically but not when used literally” (p. 420). Vauclair et al. (2023) conducted research among individuals engaged in romantic relationships from 19 different countries and their finding also show that Instant Messaging usage is positively linked to partners' fulfilment in their relationship. Moreover, their results reveal that the connection between Instant Messaging and relationship quality is significantly stronger among younger participants. The study of Hu et al. (2004) adds an interesting insight by exploring the connection between conversations run through Instant Messaging and the desire to meet face to face. According to the authors, using Instant Messaging sustains intimacy, and regular communication through this channel fosters longing for in-person meetings.

Döring (2014) defines sexting as the “interpersonal exchange of self-produced sexualized texts and above all images (photos, videos) via cell phone or the internet” (p. 1). The author notes that in the digital age, sexting can be perceived as a regular form of intimate interaction,

which is facilitated by communication technology. In the academic context, there were several concerns associated with sexting and its negative consequences. Yet more modern approaches analysing shifts in sexual behaviours emphasise the prevalence of sexuality that is mediated through technology. According to this perspective, this type of communication can be seen as a “novel way to develop digital intimacy” (Montanaro et al., 2022, p. 2). Lindner (2023) mentioned that sexting has become more and more prevalent and is being performed by both teenagers and adults. According to Lindner (2023), nearly four out of 10 individuals engaged in romantic relationships exchange messages including sexual content and almost half of those individuals indicate that sexting has beneficial effects on their relationships.

McDaniel and Drouin (2015) focused their study on married couples and their findings suggest that this demographic group is actively engaged in sexting, however older couples send significantly fewer messages of this type than younger generations. In addition, a majority of the messages included text content instead of photos. As stated by the authors, “approximately 12% of husbands and wives sent nude or nearly nude photos to their partners versus approximately 20-30% of young adults who have done so” (McDaniel & Drouin, 2015, p. 633). Cole (2017) investigated the motives of long-term partners for sexting. He found five common intentions that were mentioned by interviewees, namely escaping from boredom, finding entertainment, sending messages out of a feeling of duty, dealing with distance, and keeping an intimate atmosphere as a preview to the events planned for the night. Another study found that sexting is largely important for distant partners since it can substitute physical intimacy in the relationship and can be seen as a strategy for relationship maintenance (Ouytsel et al., 2020). Beckmeyer et al. (2021) compared long-distance couples to geographically close partners and their study suggests that distant partners are more prone to engage in sexting with their partner than those in close proximity. The authors mentioned that sexting serves as a means to bridge the physical gap by maintaining emotions and sustaining intimacy.

Pateno et al. (2022) investigated how Millennials use Netspeak, “a language with internet-inherent characteristics, including a combination of abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and other modifications on words and sentences” (p. 1980), while interacting with others. Their

findings show that more than 70% of respondents regularly employ internet-based language and they primarily use Netspeak within friendship or romantic relationship. The authors highlighted that the vast majority of respondents employ emojis and specific acronyms when communicating with a romantic partner and it reflects the desire to express intimacy beyond simple words. Tupamahu et al. (2023) explored how users utilize Netspeak on Instagram. The authors argue that Instagram is characterized by limited textual interactions, which as a result prompts users to write concisely, and the main purpose of Netspeak use is to “convey emotions and reactions” (p. 689). Furthermore, the authors pointed out that Netspeak conversations adhere to specific dynamics, ensuring turn-taking discussions, which refer to the online practice of individuals taking turns to interact in text-based chats. Tahir and Hassan (2021) analysed the motives for the use of Netspeak on social media, such as Facebook, among Generation Y and Generation X. The main factors influencing the use of Netspeak are presented in Figure 1.

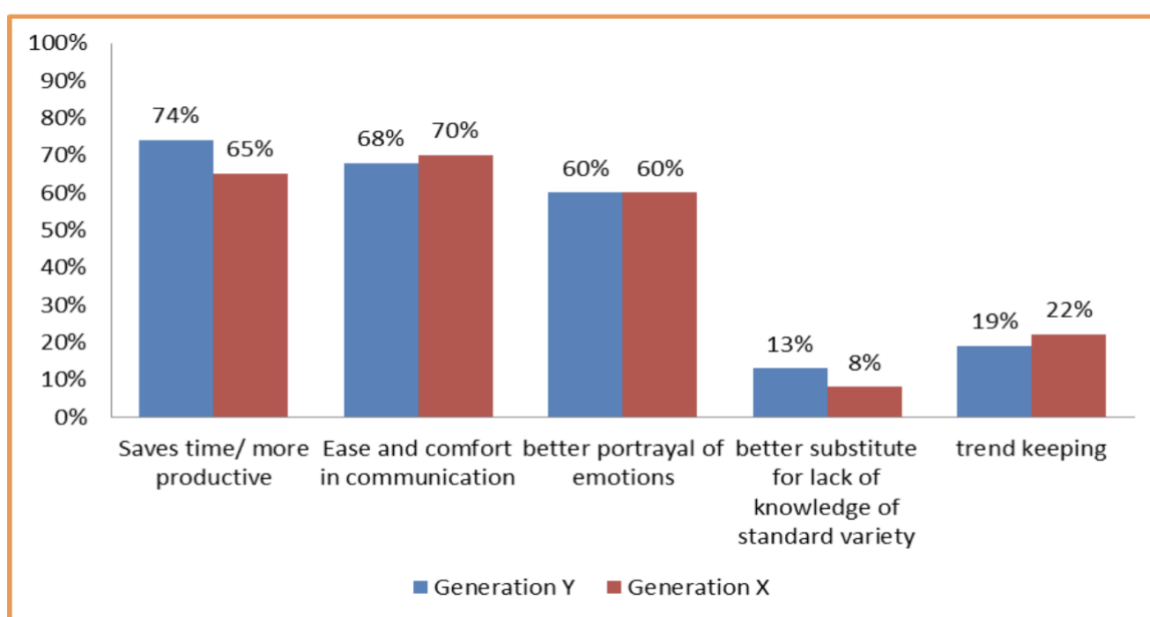


Figure 1 Reasons for using Netspeak by Generation Y and Generation X. From Bhatti & Hassam (2021) *Impact of Netspeak on the Writing Skills of Generation X and Generation Y*.

The most significant findings show similar results among the two generations concerning the convenience and emotional expressiveness; 68% of respondents from Generation Y and 70% from Generation X stated that Netspeak provides them with convenience and ease during dialogues, while 60% of respondents from both generations indicated that Netspeak allows for greater emotional expression. In addition, the authors mentioned that several elements of Netspeak originate from the English language, which is why during

conversations between individuals from different countries, it can blur language differences and unify communication. With regard to emotional expressiveness, Kelly and Watts (2015) argued that the use of Netspeak can be seen as a tool for relationship maintenance. The authors suggested that using internet-based language, such as emojis, allows couples for “creating shared and secret uniqueness” (Kelly & Watts, 2015, p. 5). According to them, individuals can employ Netspeak to construct meaning that holds significance unique to their relationship, “thus what begins as a relatively meaningless endeavor can become something that is likely to be relationally valuable through the co-creation of unique meaning” (p. 6).

2.2.4.3. VIDEO CALLS

According to Hertlein and Chan (2020), unlike other forms of digital communication, video conferencing has been largely analysed in connection to LDRs, since it provides visual features, which are not offered by other channels. In their study, Hertlein and Chan (2020) interviewed adults engaged in romantic relationships, and their findings suggest that video calls are predominantly used for facilitating real-time communication and fostering significant dialogues, such as mediating disputes. Participants reported that their partners showed higher level of attention during videoconferencing and, particularly for distant couples, it encourages “a greater sense of connection between partners...[and]...simulates the direct presence of the partner” (p. 751). In line with these arguments, Johnson (2016) pointed out that video chats are contesting the division between online and offline communication by presenting vocal and nonverbal cues, which reduce misunderstanding. Despite previously conducted research suggesting that couples tend to establish a regular schedule for video calls (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2012), Johnson’s (2016) findings indicate that distant partners try not to get involved in this type of routine, since “it puts pressure on things” (p. 26). According to the authors, a majority of respondents uses video calls to normalize their distant relationship, and feel the presence of loved ones.

Neustaedter and Greenberg (2012) discussed how couples integrate video calls in their daily routine. The authors discussed the notion of “shared activities” (p. 757), which include daily activities performed simultaneously by couples while being connected through video chat. Mentioned activities included “watching television or videos...[and]...sharing meals” (p. 757). Interviewed couples indicated that playing the same TV shows or films concurrently

allows them to see the facial expressions of their partner and enables commenting on what they think, while sharing meals was linked to regularity, which a couple living together would typically do.

Within the context of intimacy, participants in one study discussed the importance of videoconferencing and their answers reflect that multiple sensory aspects of video calls contribute to maintaining feelings of intimacy and closeness (Watson et al., 2020). In their study, Jiang and Hancock (2013) found a connection between video chatting and *cue multiplicity*, which can be defined as “the extent to which a medium can convey multiple cues relevant to the interaction such as verbal expressions, voice inflection, facial expressions, and body gestures” (p. 561). Their findings suggest that video chatting possesses the greatest variety of the abovementioned cues compared to other digital forms of communication. The authors examined concluded that communication through video chats may enhance the feeling of intimacy between partners. Kusisto (2015) recognised that for the participants in her study, video chatting maintained a sense of intimacy with their loved ones more effectively than any other technological means. All the respondents indicated that they utilize various mediums of communication, yet video chatting was the one that improved emotional and physical closeness. Nevertheless, the author highlighted that all the couples who took part in the study agreed that “*feeling* physically close through video chatting was not the same as actually *being* in geographic proximity” (p. 21).

2.2.4.4. CONTENT SHARING

2.2.4.4.1. PRIVATE CONTENT SHARING

Social media are centred around the dissemination of content among users and modern improvements of those platforms are closely linked to the increased prevalence and ease of transmission of the content (Villi, 2012). Sleeper et al. (2016) focused their research on the topic of *personal content sharing* (p. 101) and the choices of users when it comes to distributing specific content through particular channels. Their main finding suggests that users choose the channel for sharing content based on the task that they want to perform. In connection to social media, the authors pointed out that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are commonly used by individuals to maintain connections with relatives and

friends and to “use content to facilitate or as part of conversation” (p. 105). According to Sleeper et al. (2016), instant messaging, enabled by certain platforms, plays a crucial role in this process since it allows users to select a specific person that they want to share content with. Several participants stated that the possibility to select a receiver is an important privacy matter and users can feel that they have a control over what stays private and what is shared to the public.

Venema and Lobinger (2017) discussed the topic of sharing photographs on social media between partners and they suggested that this action holds significant importance in relationships because it creates a sense of shared visual space. Partners are likely to improve their connection and intimacy, as well as engage in real-time communication through the simultaneous exchange of pictures in private messages. Besides the fact that the participants in their study considered the exchange of photographs emotional, amusing, and beneficial for connection, they “strongly emphasise trustful relationships as a fundamental condition for sharing process” (Venema & Lobinger, 2017, para. 7). Drouin and Tobin (2014) examined the notion of exchanging nude photos among partners and stated that this can be perceived as a common behaviour of committed couples. According to the authors, sharing intimate images exposing the naked body may be seen as desired gesture, as long as partners mutually agreed to receive such content. Another finding of their study suggests that the main factors convincing an individual to send nude images to his/her partner include “flirtation, foreplay, to foster intimacy, and to fulfill a partner’s needs” (Drouin & Tobin, 2014, p. 415). Yet, several participants indicated that they unwillingly exchanged such photos with their partner in order to prevent a disagreement or boost self-confidence while feeling insecure about their relationship.

Castaño Diaz (2013) defined internet memes as “a unit of information (idea, concept or belief), which replicates by passing on via Internet (e-mail, chat, forum, social networks, etc.) in the shape of a hyper-link, video, image, or phrase” (p. 97). Mortensen and Neumayer (2021) argue that the main characteristic of an internet meme is its humorous form and the ability to depict even serious matters in a rather playful way. In connection to the present study, Turliuc et al. (2021) pointed out that humour is an essential element in establishing, nurturing, and enhancing romantic connections. Its positive attributes encourage couples to

openly express their happiness and it enables the demonstration of affection and warmth within romantic relationships. Another study suggested that the presence of humour forecasted higher levels of relationship contentment and “shared laughter within a relationship predicts not only relationship satisfaction, but also evaluations of closeness, relationship quality, and social support” (Walker et al., 2024, p. 2353). Tibbs (2023) mentioned that exchanging memes with romantic partners has become prevalent in relationships, as partners are encouraged by multiple platforms to share humorous content. According to the author, sharing such content serves as a means of providing comfort and increasing attractiveness to partner, by exposing the humorous traits of one’s character. Brody and Cullen (2023) investigated the frequency of sharing memes within close relationships and the results of their study indicate that individuals tend to send memes more often to their romantic partners rather than to close friends or family members. Yet, it is essential to note that the importance of meme exchange did not differ between the mentioned groups of receivers.

2.2.4.4.2. PUBLIC CONTENT SHARING

A Pew Research Center (2020) study suggests that approximately 30% of people utilizing social media have talked about their romantic relationships on these platforms. This behaviour is especially visible among younger generations, as nearly 50% of respondents aged 18 to 29 have shared their romantic moments on social media and are “likely to see social media as an important way to show how much they care about their partner” (Pew Research Center, 2020, p. 19). This is supported by a recent report published by META FORESIGHT, which states that there has been a substantial increase in discussion topics connected to love on Facebook and Instagram. According to the report, the discussions including the word *boyfriend* on Instagram reached a growth rate of 4,132% compared to the previous year, while the topic of *intimate relationships* increased by 4,078% on Facebook (META FORESIGHT, 2023).

Darell (2016) argued that relationship status is perceived by individuals as a primary feature of Facebook and 6 out of 10 users choose to display their status on their main profile. Seidman (2015) observed that as a romantic relationship advances beyond its initial stages, “a couple decides to go Facebook official (FBO)” (para. 5). In other words, partners decide to announce their relationship through a change to their Facebook status. Yet the author

pointed out that these practices can lead to uncertainty and emotional strain within relationships, as women find the release of their status more important than men and it may cause disagreement concerning the couple's disclosure. In line with this argument, Ballantine et al. (2015) analysed the reactions of users to relationship status and their findings indicate that feedback from fellow users has the potential to impact perceptions of a Facebook relationship status change. According to the authors, supportive remarks generated positive perceptions of the relationships status, whereas negative feedback resulted in less favourable views of sharing their relationship status.

Romantic partners often engage in expressions of affection on social media platforms. These depictions of virtual romance frequently include posting images showcasing romantic moments they experience with their partner or just simply disclosing to the world the fact that they are a couple (Rifat, 2020). In line with this argument, Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) focused their research on Instagram platform and they argue that "social media platforms... provide the possibility for couples to share their happiness with the acquaintances" (p. 6827). In addition, their findings suggest that Instagram has a large impact on the offline activities of couples. As mentioned by the participants, partners might be more motivated to take part in offline activities in order to share it on Instagram afterwards and they are likely to plan their real-life events based on the attractive visual content seen on Instagram. On the contrary, the findings of Miguel's (2016) study suggest that people tend to be reluctant when it comes to sharing intimate details on Facebook. However, several participants acknowledged tolerating certain levels of relationship disclosure, such as being tagged in photos published by their partner. In addition, a majority of interviewees agreed that there is an existing boundary of what should and should not be displayed on social media, with scrutiny applied to posts containing intimate details or sexual images.

2.3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

2.3.1. CHALLENGES

2.3.1.1. TRUST

Campbell and Stanton (2019) highlighted that trust can be perceived as a core element of a flourishing and secure romantic connection. Furthermore, they noted that at the initial stage of relationship formation, partners are characterized by an inherent distrust, which can later change into trust, based on certain behaviours and actions taken by romantic partners. In addition, when a couple is placed in critical situations, “where partners’ choices can prove helpful or detrimental to the relationship” (Campbell & Stanton, 2019, p. 149), the level of trust may improve or diminish based on partners’ decisions. Another study suggested that trust undergoes transformations as romantic relationships progress through various stages, yet while it is continued, it ensures the lasting of a relationship (Yilmaz et al., 2023).

The 20th century saw a sexual revolution in much of Western society, which was characterized by increased social acceptance of temporary and loose intimate bonds. This phenomenon stemmed from shifts in legal and social norms, as well as the popularity and accessibility of new technologies, allowing for the introduction of new norms in sexual behaviour and posing threats to trust (Van De Rijt & Buskens, 2006). Green (2012) argued that beside the fact that the emergence of the internet offered several options to interact with other users, it also introduced risks that can influence the level of trust among individuals. According to Green (2012), the risks associated with online social interactions encompass “the possibility of emotional betrayal, violations of privacy, or in more extreme cases, physical harm” (p. 44), as well as the risk occurring when people act on advice they encountered online, not taking into consideration that the information might be incorrect.

Norton and Baptist (2014) investigated the process of setting certain boundaries among couples, while utilizing social networking sites and its connection to trust. Their findings revealed that committed partners tend to establish certain rules while navigating the online environment. The presence of trust in romantic relationship influences “behaviors that reflect sharing online social networking information and curb online flirting and relationships with former romantic partners” (Norton & Baptist, 2014, para. 15). Even though their study suggested that committed partners are characterized by transparency and they willingly set strict rules, a Pew Report (2020) indicated that more than 50% of individuals who use social media reported having used these channels to monitor the actions of people they previously dated. In addition, the report highlighted the fact that around 23% of individuals engaged in

romantic relationships experienced higher levels of jealousy and insecurity related to their partner's social media usage, especially because of interpersonal connections with other users (Pew Research Center, 2020). This argument is also confirmed by the study of Sedghijalal and Fathi (2015), which found that the level of trust between partners decreased when their loved one excessively used social media platforms.

According to Fox and Warber (2014), social media platforms introduce a unique way for partners to collect information about one another. The author called this phenomenon *monitoring* and stated that it is one of the most frequent activities performed by users on these platforms. Partners are likely to secretly observe each other in an online setting, using social networks as tools of surveillance to discover more about their relationship or potentially create new ones. Ruggieri et al. (2021) added that partners' monitoring is strictly connected to *interpersonal electronic surveillance*, which can be seen as a regular tracking of partners' online activities caused by distrust or anxiety within the relationship. As mentioned by the authors, this type of surveillance alleviates doubts and "help partners to reduce relational uncertainty" (Ruggieri et al., 2021, p. 2).

Aloia (2023) pointed out the link between monitoring behaviours and jealousy among romantic partners, as "cognitive and emotional jealousy were positively associated with interpersonal electronic surveillance" (p. 448). Nevertheless, the author highlighted that previous studies suggested that the main purpose of electronic surveillance was to limit partners' access to potential competitors, while currently partner monitoring is used to have a general overview of their life, including online and offline activities. Schokkenbroek et al. (2022) noted that the monitoring of partners' activities online appeared to be accepted in society, as previous findings indicated that monitoring practices are perceived by many as a demonstration of love.

2.3.1.2. INTIMACY

Moss and Schwebel (1993) highlighted the importance of intimacy for partners involved in a relationship, as it "exerts a profound influence on their social development, personal adjustment, and physical health" (p. 31). Lippert and Prager (2005) argued that several studies have tried to define the core elements of intimacy, however there is no agreement

within academia, implying that these components might differ between individuals. Nevertheless, the findings of their study revealed a strong connection between intimacy and diverse types of disclosure, such as disclosure of “private information, of emotions, and of positive feelings about the partners” (Lippert & Prager, 2005, p. 294). According to the authors, those forms of disclosing oneself provide a distinct contribution to how couples perceive intimacy in their relationship. Eldemire (2023) identified two distinctive forms of intimacy: physical and emotional. Physical intimacy includes sensual interactions, physical enjoyment, and sexual attraction, while emotional intimacy involves feelings of closeness, safety, and emotional openness. As argued by the author, both forms of intimacy should be integrated in a relationship and should be perceived as inseparable elements that contribute to lasting bonds between partners.

Valentine (2006) mentioned that the emergence of the internet provided an opportunity to reconsider intimacy in social relationships. Since people become more often geographically separated, the internet allows them, to some extent, to perform intimate acts, which can sustain both physical and emotional intimacy. Yet the author discussed the obstacles occurring during online interactions, which largely influence physical intimacy. According to Valentine (2006), “the absence of actual touch can serve only to accentuate the emotional pain of missing or longing for another body” (p. 388). Another study suggests that digital technologies may negatively impact intimate connections because the widespread usage of online technologies has limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions (Dalessandro, 2018). Some of the participants mentioned that they lack traditional forms of creating intimate bonds, as a majority of individuals felt that online expression is more convenient and real-life connections require more effort and openness. Dalessandro (2018) depicted this problem as a clash of convenience and authenticity, explaining that “young adults usually construct digitally mediated relationships as in opposition to this authenticity and the authentic relationships that seem increasingly out of reach to them” (p. 638).

Hertlein and Stevenson (2010) identified in previous literature five problems connected to online intimacy among couples, namely anonymity, accessibility, affordability, approximation, and acceptability. Anonymity refers to the idea that individuals are able to choose how they want to project their identity to others, and they can choose the identity that

can vary from their real one. Accessibility is explained as the ubiquitous presence of the internet, as users may access countless websites, social media platforms, and online chats, and connect with someone other than their partner, posing a threat in a form of an affair. Affordability is strictly connected to the financial situation because generally speaking the internet is affordable for nearly everyone. Consequently, it may offer cheap alternatives to the relationship, including being unfaithful, and may also influence emotional intimacy, when partners refuse to invest money while spending time together in real life. Approximation is associated with the aspects of the internet that simulates real-life scenarios, essentially “what can be viewed on the Internet is becoming more close to the physical world” (p. 3). Approximation can largely influence the feeling of security in connection to physical intimacy, when one of the partners might have higher expectations after exploring the internet. Lastly, acceptability refers to the notion that certain types of behaviours, which have been classified as socially unacceptable, have gained acceptance online. It is specifically important for sustaining intimacy among couples, as partners may cross boundaries in the online environment and interpret it as acceptable, since online norms vary from real life ethics.

2.3.1.3. DISTRACTION

Aagaard (2014) mentioned that the ubiquitous presence of technology has introduced major societal changes among individuals born since 1980. Certain generations grew up in an environment where new technologies became embedded in their daily routines, and it is claimed that these changes have altered the cognitive processes of these individuals. Aagaard (2014) argues that people in these generations “developed the ability to rapidly process parallel and discontinuous information, are used to immediacy, crave speed, and feel comfortable performing several tasks at once” (p. 886).

Several scholars have investigated this topic from the perspective of the distraction posed by new technologies and examined it within the contexts of education (Dontre, 2020), family studies (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018), organizational behaviour (Orhan et al., 2021), or adolescent psychology (Swar & Hameed, 2017). It also argued that distraction caused by technology may interfere with romantic relationships, as “cell phone-related distractions could lead to lower levels of satisfaction with one’s romantic partner” (Roberts & David,

2016, p. 135). A Pew Research Center report (2020) shows that approximately half of respondents who are engaged in romantic relationships indicate that their loved one is frequently or occasionally preoccupied with their cellphone during conversations. In addition, around 40% reported being annoyed by the time their partner dedicates to using their cellphone. The report also suggested gender differences concerning attitudes towards distraction, as “women are about twice as likely as men to say they are often bothered by the amount of time their partner spends on their cellphone” (Pew Research Center, 2020, p. 7).

McDaniel & Coyne (2014) introduced the concept of *technoferece*, which refers to “everyday intrusions or interruptions in couple interactions or time spent together that occur due to technology” (p. 4). According to the authors, technoferece can take various forms and it can include disruptions in direct real-life dialogues or the sense of disturbance one experiences when their partner utilizes technological devices during shared activities. More importantly, their findings show that couples who encounter higher levels of technoferece are more likely to engage in arguments and are characterized by decreased life contentment and diminished relationship satisfaction.

Koessmeier and Büttner (2021) perceive social media platforms as a prominent distraction which is caused by two main factors, namely the desire to stay online and the reluctance to undertake tasks. The first element is driven by the need for social connection, as individuals prefer to stay online, to be available for the members of their social net, and to avoid the feeling of missing out, while task-related interruption stems from a desire to avoid unpleasant tasks. The second factor has its roots in the motivations for using social media, since users are likely to participate in pleasant activities online, rather than complete unwanted duties. In line with this argument, Christensen (2018) asked participants if utilization of social media negatively impacted their interpersonal connections. A majority of respondents identified distraction from face-to-face interactions the main negative result of social media usage. Another study, involving 25 interviews with romantic couples, revealed that although there are numerous benefits to their relationships, partners frequently become absorbed in social media instead of engaging with each other (Arikewuyo et al., 2021). In fact, this negatively impacted the growth of their connection, and social media

distractions have been associated with long-term consequences, such as success of relationship or its termination (Arikewuyo et al., 2021).

2.3.2. OPPORTUNITIES

2.3.2.1. CONSTANT CONNECTION

Hua (2016) argued that the emergence of digital media has significantly expanded the possibilities for constant connection among couples. More importantly, the author considered constant connection to be an essential element of a successful relationship since it enables couples to be updated about their daily routine and creates the impression of nearly real-time conversations. In contrast to previous studies, the findings of Hua (2016) indicate that these ways of being in contact “are not necessarily lesser forms of communication that face-to-face conversations” (p. 243). According to Amez & Baert (2020), smartphones play a crucial role in sustaining constant connection between individuals, especially considering the fact that in Western cultures most people use these devices. Their research found that nearly 50% of respondents stated that “they could not live without their smartphone” (p. 1). Marino et al. (2021) argued that smartphones provide the option to conveniently use social media applications, while Barbish et al. (2019) observed that social media platforms can be perceived as novel channels allowing users constant communication, enabling nearly real-life communication. Another study, by Hu (2004), suggested that constant connection can be maintained through instant messaging, which consists of two main features. The first is the capacity to show who is online at the moment and available to chat, while the second is the possibility to exchange messages between users instantaneously. The study also revealed that instant messaging is commonly used among young adults and those participants who use instant messaging frequently are likely to create intimate bonds with other users and have an urge to meet in person. Consequently, it can be stated that instant messaging supports rather than obstructs closeness (Hu, 2004). Ledbetter (2014) explored the factors influencing the frequency of using specific media among individuals involved in romantic relationships. His findings indicate that Online Social Connection, defined in his previous research as “the extent to which an individual believes that online communication is an important part of... individual’s social life” (Ledbetter, 2009a, p. 472), can be perceived as a strong indicator of instant messaging usage among couples. The author mentioned that when at least one partner

believes that online communication helps him/her stay connected with their social network, the couple tends to use instant messaging more frequently, at the same time sustaining continuous interactions.

2.3.2.2. ONLINE 'SHARED' COMMUNITIES

Gomillion et al. (2017) claimed that the integration of social networks into romantic relationship is an essential factor to create partners shared social identity. Sharing friends correlates with higher level of satisfaction, commitment and positive outlook regarding the future of their relationship. Moreover, the authors argue that partners with shared social contacts are characterized by decreased probability of separation, which influences the longevity of their relationship. Further evidence supporting these findings is also demonstrated by Blair and Holmberg (2008), who discussed the notion of social support for the romantic relationship and its impact on the general well-being of individuals. Their findings suggest that relationships are not isolated entities but are embedded within broader social constructs. Social networks can be perceived as an essential element in forecasting the well-being of the romantic connection, as well as of the individuals engaged in this type of a relationship.

Fiori et al. (2018) argued that the early disapproval of a partner's friends can lead to serious consequences, including creating tension in marriages, terminating relationship, decreasing interdependence, or exposing partners to negative feelings, such as jealousy. Another study (Communication, 2016) suggested that mutual social connections serve as one of the most influential factors in determining the longevity or dissolution of a romantic relationship. In addition, emotional support from friends and relatives can aid a couple in navigating relationship during crisis moments (Communication, 2016). The study of Grieve et al. (2013) was centred around the connection between social networking sites, with an emphasis on Facebook, and interpersonal bonds. The authors suggested that social engagements can be derived from using social media and that these platforms, such as Facebook, facilitate nurturing friendships and fostering connections. Users are likely to experience heightened feelings of connection to their acquaintances. More importantly, favorable psychological effects, namely "lower depression, lower anxiety, and greater subjective wellbeing" (Grieve et al., 2013, p. 608) were linked to online social interactions on social networking sites.

Wilkerson (2017) argued that depicting romantic relationships on social media platforms holds a great significance for couples since it is a convenient way to inform peers about their private life and reveal their status. As stated by the author, “romantic partners can express their relationship online for essentially everyone they know to see” (para. 1). Another study pointed out that presenting a partner primarily on social media was associated with higher chances of approval from friends and relatives in real life situations. Once acquaintances get to know the person through social media, they may have a feeling of closer connection and familiarity than to a person that has not been introduced online. Consequently, new technologies allow partners to build social networks in real life with the aid of online platforms (National University, 2024).

2.3.2.3. LONG-DISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Digital advancements have revolutionized the experience of connecting with distant partners through several online channels. In the pre-digital era, forming LDRs was often associated with high costs and limited possibilities. However, today’s online communication media offer a chance to form such relationships regardless of individuals’ status, location, or financial situation (Hertlein et al., 2013). Computer-mediated communication offers novel ways to bond with friends and family. The internet enables the development of worldwide communities where relationships can last without being limited by geographical distance (Hampton & Wellman, 2001). The opportunities offered by new technologies are also noticed by the society, as recent report suggests that 49% of individuals seeking love consider engaging in LDR (Brown, 2020). Supporting this argument, Chae (2024) argued that regular connection is vital for distant partners and new technology offers a wide range of opportunities, such as social media platforms, which have the ability to maintain this daily connection. These platforms allow partners not only to share significant and everyday moments, but also to facilitate bonding and participation in one another’s routine. According to the author, long-distance couples might not be able to see each other often, but technology gives them possibility to imitate face-to-face activities through several features, such as video calls. Partners can participate in online date nights, view movies simultaneously and much more, which can sustain the dynamics of the relationship and help to generate shared memories despite the distance.

Billedo et al. (2015) explored the relationship maintenance strategies of long-distance partners compared to couples living in close proximity and their findings indicate that couples utilize social media platforms to express and assess their level of engagement with their partners. Moreover, these platforms are used more frequently by distant partners than individuals living together, and participants expressed that social media can effectively support relationship maintenance. Overall, their study underscores that social media platforms offer unique opportunities for long-distance partners, providing compensation for the lack of physical closeness and traditional forms of maintaining romantic relationships. Underlining the importance of this argument, Belus et al. (2018) stated that relationship maintenance behaviours (RMBs) are positively correlated to partners' satisfaction. In addition, these actions lead to better relationship outcomes, as "RMBs may help an individual to handle the time apart more effectively by increasing one's thoughts and internal processing of the separation" (Belus et al., 2018, p. 93).

3. RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

3.1. DEFINING RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

According to Hardie & Lucas (2010), relationship quality is often perceived as a broad and vague concept that can include objective and subjective assessments of partners' general well-being. It can be measured through various factors such as "individual-level happiness and content, frequency of arguing, conflict, violence, and relationship dissolution" (p. 1144). Nevertheless, Hardie & Lucas (2010) argue that concentrating on just one of mentioned indicators fails to capture the complexity of relationship quality. Farooqi (2014) compared relationship quality to "an evaluation of the individual's relationship" (p. 7), which is based on the assessment of positive and negative emotions experienced by each partner. Yet he argued that it is a multidimensional concept, and its definition may vary across different types of relationships, methods used to study it, and even the interchangeable terms used to describe quality, such as "satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and so on" (p. 7). In line with his argument, Marshall et al. (2020) noted that scholars often interchangeably used the terms *quality* and *satisfaction* in their publications, aiming to uncover the same dimensions of romantic relationship, as both terms encompass similar aspects.

Canevello & Crocker (2010) pointed out that the quality of interpersonal relationships plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall wellbeing of individuals, while low quality of mentioned relationships can increase stress and lead to negative impact on health and general life satisfaction. Canevello & Crocker (2010) believe that the quality of relationship is vastly influenced by how much one believes their partner is responsive, as "people who perceive their relationship partners as responsive feel close, satisfied, and committed" (p. 1). It is important to highlight findings from another study (Twiselton et al., 2020) that emphasised the mutual nature between relationship quality and general well-being: just as the quality of a relationship impacts the well-being of the partners, the well-being of each partner also affects the quality of the relationship. As pointed out by the authors, "when individuals are involved in a relationship, their outcomes result not only from their own characteristics and inputs but also from their partner's characteristics and inputs" (Twiselton et al., 2020, p. 896).

Temel & Dawd (2023) mentioned that most of the prior studies on romantic relationships has focused on “variables such as trust, authenticity, emotion regulation, and perceived physical attractiveness” (p. 76) in order to find the crucial points of improving the quality of relationships. Yet their findings suggested that these variables are closely linked to broader influencers, such as “parenting style and attachment styles” (p. 77). Temel & Dawd (2023) suggested that background factors are likely to shape specific elements, such as emotional management or trust, which subsequently influence the overall quality of close relationships. Joel et al. (2020) pointed out that a broad range of constructs and concepts influence relationships quality and durability. Certain elements pertain to individual traits, while others capture the perceptions and experiences of partners within their partnership. Figure 2 depicts the factors that determine how partners interact with each other, ultimately impacting the quality of their relationships and a range of significant effects.

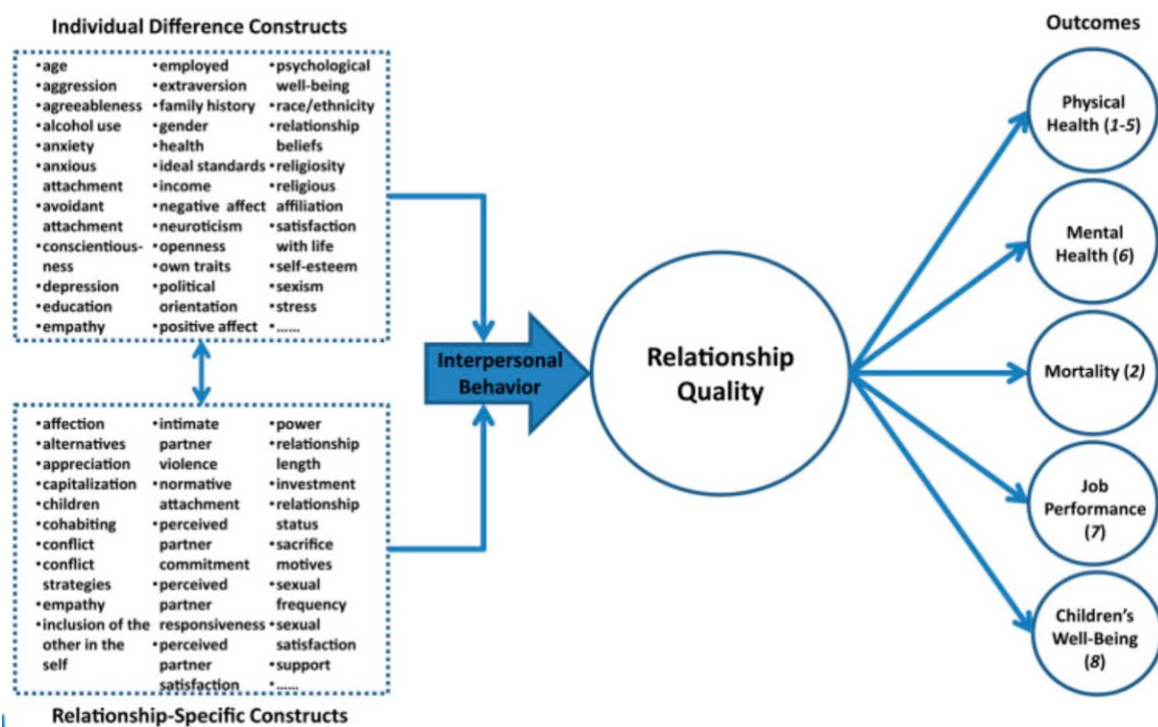


Figure 2 Antecedents and consequences of relationship quality. Retrieved from: *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2020 August 11; 117(32): 19061-19071.

According to Brenner (2018), several publications linked high-quality relationships with improved mental and physical health, while negative health outcomes were strictly connected to low relationship quality. Brenner (2018) mentioned that intimate relationships, which are categorised as of poor quality, are tied to “more frequent physical and mental

health problems” (para. 1) as well as reduced longevity. The study conducted by Adamczyk et al. (2021), which was centered around the relationship between the quality of romantic partnerships and health issues, presented two important findings. First, people involved in romantic relationships tend to have improved health, as “participants reported better health in years in which they were in more satisfied relationships than in years in which they were single” (p. 645). Secondly, being in a relationship was strongly supportive to health when relationship was characterised by high quality and satisfaction. Their study shows that it was particularly evident in the reduced likelihood of developing depression when individuals were in high-quality relationship. Considering physical health, numerous studies proved the positive influence of high-quality relationships on improving physical health. Robles et al. (2014) stated that high relational satisfaction among married individuals was associated with improved overall physical health. In addition, Chen et al. (2015) suggested that experiencing greater symptoms of insomnia is linked to lower level of relationship satisfaction, while individuals involved in high-quality relationships exhibited improved sleep characteristics. Lastly, Berry et al. (2001) suggested that individuals in distressed relationships showed increased levels of cortisol reactivity, reflecting elevated stress levels, which could lead to future health problems.

Heim & Heim (2023) mentioned that young couples often desire relationship longevity, yet it remains uncertain how long-term couples actually achieve it. As stated by Heim & Heim (2023), “how older couples achieved relationship longevity has often been considered as enigma” (p. 782). According to Freeman et al. (2023), relationship quality is significant in predicting relationship longevity, as aspects of quality, such as commitment or satisfaction, interact with attachment insecurity over time. Freeman et al. (2023) argued that lower relationship satisfaction, often driven by anxiety, was connected to decreased duration of the relationship. In addition, another study (Bookwala & Gaugler, 2020), focused not on the longevity of the relationship itself but on the longevity of partners involved in a relationship, suggested that low quality of relationships increases the risk of mortality among partners. Bookwala & Gaugler (2020) explained that the increased risk of mortality is directly linked to health issues, as “relationship quality with one’s spouse or partner is a key contributor to poorer health outcomes” (p. 10). Stavrova (2018) suggested a logical sequence of cause and effect connected to the topic of relationship quality and longevity. According to her research,

happiness is one of the main factors that impact the quality of a romantic relationship, and high-quality romantic relationship, in turn, influences longevity and overall well-being of partners. Stavrova (2018) concluded her findings by stating “having a happier spouse is associated not only with a longer marriage but also with a longer life” (p. 802).

A recent survey (Edwards, 2024) disclosed that happiness in a romantic relationship significantly influences individuals’ happiness and performance at work. The majority of participants (76%) noted improved work performance when they were involved with happy relationships. In addition, Edwards (2024) suggested that conflicts between couples can greatly affect an employee’s concentration at work, with 80% of participants reporting difficulties focusing when experiencing issues with their spouse or partner. In addition, the research of Kornblum et al. (2021) demonstrated that a partner’s romantic relationship can affect their pursuit of career objectives. Their findings indicated that in romantic relationships, partners are more likely to support each other and share professional ambitions. As a result, relationships based on support and commitment play an important role in enhancing the likelihood of career success. Lastly, Waweru et al. (2022) investigated the connection between job performance and marriage satisfaction. The results of their study showed significant impact between the mentioned factors, as “respondents with marital dissatisfaction are 8 times more likely to exhibit counterproductive work behaviors” (p. 19).

Goldberg & Carlson (2014) examined the connection between the quality of marriage and its impact on children. Their research revealed that children exhibit less behavioural problems when their parents maintain a strong relationship. Moreover, their findings suggested that high-quality couple’s relationships not only help to prevent external behavioural issues in children but also positively affect their internal emotional well-being. Cunningham & Thornton (2006) looked at the topic of how the quality of parents’ relationship affects their grown-up children’s views on family-related issues. Their findings showed that marital quality vastly influences the process of shaping and reinforcing the transmission of attitudes between generations. In particular, when parents have high quality marriage, their children are less likely to support the idea of divorce or being single.

3.2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Okdie & Ewoldsen (2018) mentioned in their commentary that contemporary technologies have altered the patterns of communication between people. They highlighted that majority of academic papers examined how people communicate in face-to-face environment, while they tend to overlook the significant rise in the utilization of media “to create, maintain, and develop interpersonal relationships through mediated channels” (p. 508-509).

According to Hertlein & Blumer (2013), the rise of technology has not only transformed daily interactions with friends and family, but has also changed the ways in which couples communicate. As stated by Hertlein & Blumer, although romantic partners may believe they are functioning as previous generations, “the ways we accomplish the tasks are different” (p. 10). Hultgren (2013) argued that technological influence is evident in every single phase of romantic relationship, from its beginning to its end, as well as among different types of those relationships. Hultgren highlighted that many people seek love partners online and initiate relationships in virtual space, distant partners can stay connected instantly, others can maintain their daily contact very conveniently. Yet she opened the debate on the topic whether technology has more positive or negative effects on romantic relationships, as “for love in the digital age, you never know who’s waiting inside your inbox” (p. 30). In line with this perspective, Nabila (2023) mentioned that the increasing use of the internet has significantly altered the nature of romantic connections. Online communication driven, among others, by social media, offers to partners benefits such as broader social networks and continuous communication, but also introduces challenges. Nabila emphasised that while social media platforms can enhance connection, they also require careful navigation of new norms, expectations and ethical considerations. It is particularly important for couples to balance online interactions with face-to-face experiences in order to maintain a healthy and fulfilling relationship.

Nasiche (2024) suggested that the quality of relationship may be influenced by social media, emphasising its dual impact on couple communication. While social media platforms maintain a sense of togetherness through constant connection and access to resources, it also poses new challenges that could affect the relationship’s quality. According to Nasiche, these challenges include “misunderstandings due to lack of non-verbal cues, distraction from face-

to-face interactions, and over-reliance on social media (p. 87). In addition, she pointed out that the impact of social media on relationship quality can be depicted by positive expressions of affection, but also by potential negative consequences such as jealousy and general dissatisfaction. McDaniel & Coyne (2014) presented a rather pessimistic view on the presence of technology and the extensive use of social media platforms among romantic partners. According to them, technology leads to frequent interruptions in daily life of couples and online advancements, such as social media, may cause decreased level of relationship quality. In line with their arguments, Valenzuela et al. (2014) discovered the connection between social media usage and marriage dissatisfaction. The findings of Valenzuela et al. (2014) study indicate “a positive correlation between more frequent use of SNS and the variables that reflected lower marriage quality, marriage unhappiness, experiencing a troubled relationship, and thinking about separating” (p. 99). Yet they argued that social media platforms also have the power to facilitate maintenance behaviours among romantic partners. Another study (Ziha et al., 2021) showed that numerous couples feel encouraged and valued when their partner expresses affection on social media, but considerable number experience insecurity and jealousy because of their partner’s interactions with others. As revealed in the findings of this study, only 12% of couples feel confident and unconcerned about their partner’s social media presence, while nearly 67% of couples lack honesty and transparency regarding their relationship status. Ziha et al. (2021) emphasised that lack of trust and transparency can lead to negative effects, such as low quality of relationships and it was visible among majority of the participants. All things considered; social media seems to preserve more negative than positive aspects influencing the quality of the relationships. Yet the conclusions cannot be drawn, as there are numerous studies defending social media within the context of romantic relationships. Fox et al. (2013) highlighted that partners may feel emotionally connected through social media, whereas Shockley (2017) revealed some actions that partners perform on social media make their second half feel loved. Similarly, Kuske (2020) argued that social media platforms play a significant role in maintain LDRs and emphasised the “importance of consistent communication using various media forms for relational maintenance” (p. 12).

Considering Instagram, Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) examined the reverse relationship, in particular how the quality and satisfaction of a romantic relationship impacts Instagram

activity, rather than how Instagram influences the quality of the relationship itself. As mentioned by Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022), “jealousy and relationship dissatisfaction can lead to higher engagement on social media” (p. 6834). Moreover, the results of their research indicated that Instagram plays a significant role for young adults involved in romantic relationships, serving as a channel for identity presentation, including relationship status. Another important finding of Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) is a connection between Instagram usage and the stage of relationship that participants were involved in. According to Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022), different relationship stages show varying Instagram activity patterns; while initiation stage is strictly connected to decreased Instagram usage, termination stage of the relationship, namely break-up, was associated with increased importance of Instagram for the participants.

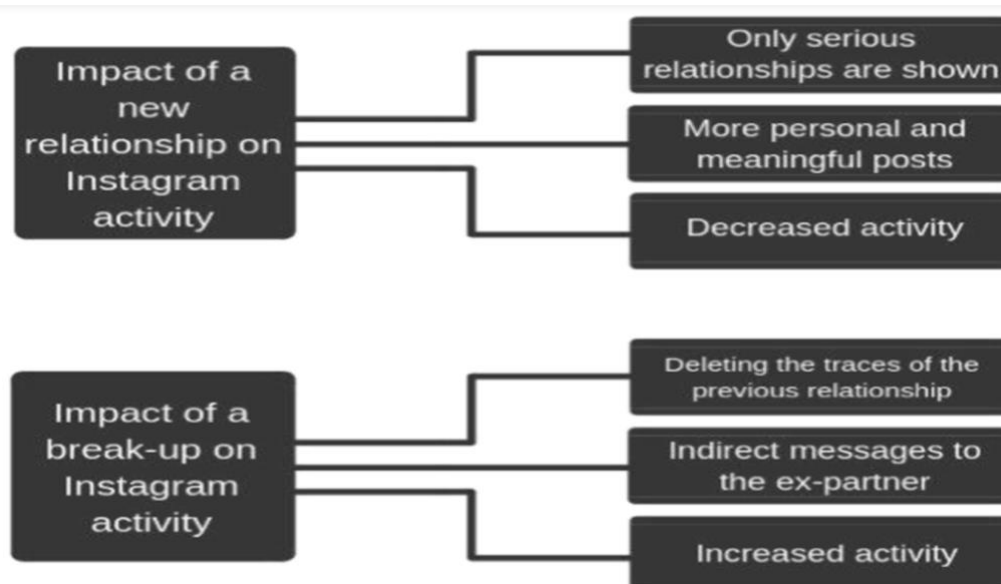


Figure 3 Impact of a New Relationship and a Break-up on Instagram Activity. Retrieved from: Fejes-Vékássy, L., Ujhelyi, A. & Faragó, L. From #RelationshipGoals to #Heartbreak – We use Instagram differently in various romantic relationship statuses. *Curr Psychol*, 41, 6825–6837 (2022).

Although Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) did not directly examine the relationship between social media use and its impact on the quality of romantic relationships, the findings strongly confirm the importance of Instagram in the dynamics of young adults’ relationships. Bouffard et al. (2021) emphasised that extensive Instagram usage can have negative impact on couples, identifying three potential causes. First, distraction caused by extensive Instagram usage might diminish meaningful face-to-face interactions between partners,

leading to lack of attentiveness, which can decrease relationship quality. Second, social media platforms often serve as a way for individuals to avoid dealing with problematic issues, which may intensify existing conflicts between partners. Lastly, extensive Instagram usage can impact the general well-being of individual's emotional health, "making it more difficult for the affected individual to sustain a happy and satisfied relationship" (p. 1533). On the contrary, Sharabi & Hopkins (2021) investigated how romantic partners' behaviours and activities on Instagram exhibit the quality of their relationships by surveying 178 couples and analysing over 3,000 of their posts available on their profiles. Their results indicate connections between relational quality and Instagram usage, as well as how attention to alternatives available on Instagram affects perceptions and behaviours of couples. In particular, results of their study showed that Instagram offers great possibilities for maintaining romantic relationships, consequently improving the general satisfaction of couples. Yet Sharabi & Hopkins (2021) highlighted that these possibilities can be only used for improving the relationships, when individuals are able to "resist the temptation of alternatives" (p. 3538).

The inconsistencies in research findings regarding the impact of social media on the quality of romantic relationships are also evident in the case of Facebook. Whiteside et al. (2018) focused their case study around examination of Facebook's impact on couples' well-being. Their research revealed that different patterns of Facebook use largely impact the quality of romantic relationships. Lower satisfaction was directly linked to cases in which partners extensively used Facebook, utilized it for reasons other than connecting with friends and family, or excluded their partner from their online social circles. In contrast, Whiteside et al. (2018) emphasised that using Facebook to maintain contact with family and friends tends to boost the relational quality. These findings call attention to the nature and extent of Facebook use, which can either strengthen or weaken the relationship satisfaction, depending on online actions and behaviours of users. Elphinston & Noller (2011) investigated the topic of jealousy and Facebook usage among romantic partners. According to Elphinston & Noller (2011), extensive Facebook usage can pose a threat to relationship quality "via the experience and expression of romantic jealousy" (p. 634). They also highlighted that while Facebook help to maintain social connections and consequently enhance emotional well-being, relying fully on Facebook to achieve these positive results may come with negative

consequences for individuals and their romantic relationships. The research conducted by Clayton & Smith (2013) analysed the connection between frequent Facebook use and harmful consequences on romantic relationships, especially early-stage relationships. The findings indicated that partners who extensively use Facebook can trigger conflicts such as “indirectly neglecting their partner, directly neglecting their partner by communication with former partners, and developing Facebook-related jealousy or constant partner monitoring, which may lead to future relationship conflict or separation” (p. 719). Nevertheless, these negative effects were more common among couples who were less than three years together, suggesting that Facebook may pose a threat to newer relationships. Another study (Fox & Warber, 2013) demonstrated that Facebook can negatively influence the quality of romantic relationships, particularly for those with higher levels of relationship anxiety. The authors explained that it happens through close monitoring of their current or former partner on Facebook, as the platform provides these individuals with broad insight into their partner’s social activities, which can often be misinterpreted. Consequently, these actions can increase the feelings of uncertainty leading to decreased relational satisfaction. Moreover, Fox and Warber (2013) suggested that constant communication with previous partners on social media, such as Facebook, may hinder emotional closure and take part in relationship instability. Conversely previously presented perspectives, the research of Imperato et al. (2023) showed that Facebook monitoring and displaying couple-related content positively influenced the quality of romantic relationships. Participants utilized Facebook not only to share information about their relationship status as a sign of commitment but also kept an eye on their partner’s activities as a way to show concern and care. These behaviours indicated that both monitoring and couple’s visibility on Facebook can contribute to boost relational satisfaction and improve maintenance behaviours.

PART II – EMPIRICAL STUDY

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH RELEVANCE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

As outlined in the literature review section, long-distance romantic relationships are frequent and increasing in numbers (Harris & Edwards, 2014). A report suggests that 49% of individuals seeking love consider engaging in a LDR (Brown, 2020), while others argue that internet accessibility is a key factor that allows for the formation and maintenance of such relationships (Hampton & Wellman, 2001; Hertlein et al., 2013). Social media platforms provide long-distance couples with the ability to connect daily and bond, as regular connection is vital for romantic partners (Chae, 2024). Among social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook hold great importance in maintaining connections and fostering intimacy among romantic partners (Hughes et al., 2021; Gutzmann, 2018), which is also supported by a recent report indicating that there has been a substantial increase in discussion topics connected to love on Facebook and Instagram (META FORESIGHT, 2023).

Previous literature suggests that LDRs are prone to failure (Kelmer et al., 2013) and despite their prevalence, they continue to be an underexplored phenomenon in academic research (Li, 2019). By investigating the role of Facebook and Instagram in sustaining the quality of long-distance romantic relationships, this research aims to fill a significant gap in the literature and explore the mechanism through which social media usage contribute to or diminish the well-being of a relationship. In order to examine this topic, the following research question has been formulated: *How does the use of Facebook and Instagram impact the quality of long-distance romantic relationships?*

4.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this research was to analyse the impact of Facebook and Instagram on the quality of long-distance romantic relationships. This study sought to explore several

dimensions of social media usage in connection to distant partners. In order to analyse this topic, the following objectives were set:

- To examine communication patterns and social media usage among long-distant romantic partners
- To understand participants' perceptions of cyber space and the online presence of their partners (feeling of partners' co-presence)
- To assess if social media platforms can sustain emotional expression and intimacy among participants
- To identify negative effects of social media usage, such as jealousy or technological distraction, on long-distance partners
- To explore the opportunities facilitated by social media in sustaining connection among distant couples
- To analyse demographic differences in connection to social media usage and LDRs, with the emphasis on distance between couples
- To investigate the connection between general relationship satisfaction and social media usage

All of the objectives were formulated based on previous studies and literature concerning couples, romantic relationships, and social media. Yet the main aim of this study was to apply the topics related to romantic relationships and test them on long distance partners and their usage of two specific social media platforms.

4.3.RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employed a qualitative methodology, centred around conducting in-depth interviews with couples and individuals engaged in LDRs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on communication through social media platforms to investigate participants' responses in greater details. This method was aimed to determine the general quality of participants' relationships and the interviews analysed from numerous angles the role of social media in reflecting the relationship quality.

4.3.1. STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

According to Wolf et al. (2016), there are two main types of sampling methods used in academic works: probability and non-probability sampling. In the case of probability sampling, every individual within a population has a known and equal chance to be recruited for the study, while non-probability sampling does not guarantee the same chances of selection and it does not involve randomization (Wolf et al., 2016). Acharya et al. (2013) mentioned that there are existing variations of non-probability sampling, including convenience sampling and snowball sampling (network sampling). Acharya et al. (2013) explained that convenience sampling occurs when “the sample is chosen on the basis of the convenience of the investigator” (p. 332), while Sharma (2017) explained that snowball sampling relies on the recruitment of new individuals from the network of initial participants. Consequently, as stated by Sharma, “the sample group appears to grow like a rolling snowball” (p. 752).

The study population for this thesis was made up of both couples and individuals involved in long-distance romantic relationships. In order to identify and recruit participants, two sampling methods were applied, namely convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Figure 4. depicts the visual representation of the chosen sample method for this study.

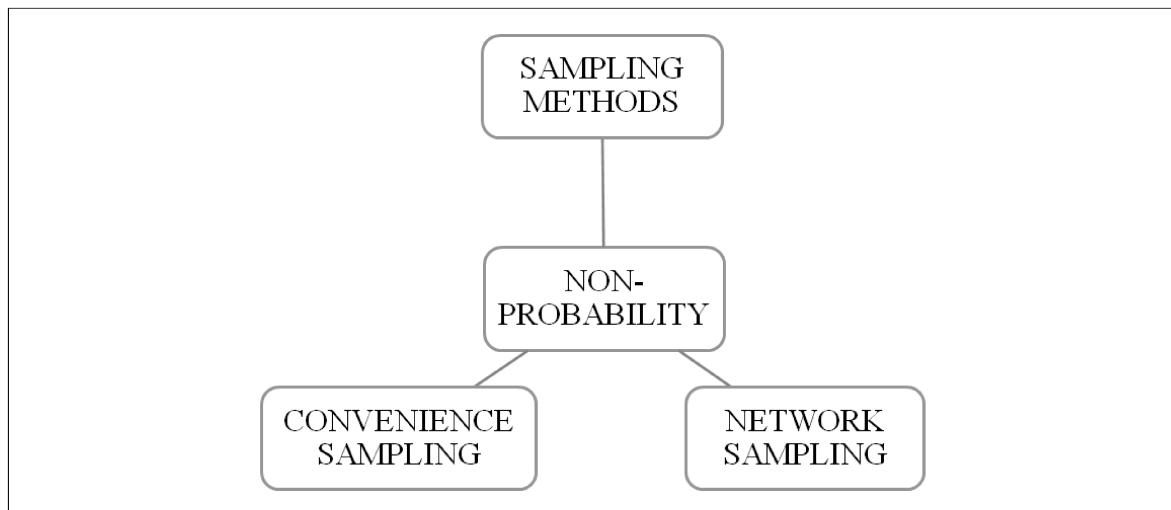


Figure 4 Chosen sampling methods for the research.

First, an invitation to participate in the research was posted on social media platform, in particular on Facebook, reflecting the convenience sampling method. The posts (see Appendix A) consisted of a brief description of the research, including the criteria for participation, and were shared on various groups and chats. Secondly, a post was shared on

Instagram story to invite individuals interested in joining the study (see Appendix B). This post remained available for 24 hours and was reposted several times at short intervals to maximize reach. This approach facilitated snowball sampling, as individuals who responded to the post were connected through chat and subsequently referred other potential individuals who were involved in LDRs. Choosing Facebook and Instagram as the main channels of distribution ensured that participants were active on at least one of the mentioned platforms, which was essential as the study was focused on communication through those media. Simultaneously, face-to-face conversations with individuals were conducted to identify potential participants. After identification of individuals who met the criteria to participate in the study, these individuals recommended their partners, who might fulfill the requirements of participation and offered contact details in order to reach them. This snowball sampling method allowed the sampling procedure to expand, accessing a wider network of couples involved in long-distance romantic relationships.

The study population of people engaged in LDRs is not clearly defined in the literature, as mentioned by Krapf (2018): “the definition of what constitutes a long distance differs across studies” (p. 315-316). Krapf (2018) highlighted that the majority of reports and surveys do not define the minimum distance between partners in order to categorize them as distant partners. Additionally, the majority of previous studies focused on one specific geographical district or individuals belonging to the same nation (Statista, 2015; Schmall, 2018). In connection to this argument, the aim of this research was to recruit participants, with distances confirmed to be significantly long in order to fill the existing gaps in academia. As a consequence, a diverse group of 9 couples (18 individuals) and 9 individuals was recruited for the study (see Table 3; Table 4). This multinational group ranged in age between 21 and 37 years old and each participant stated that they were involved in a non-marital long-distance romantic relationship at the time of the interview. Out of 27 participants, 15 identified as female and 12 identified as male, providing a balanced view on the experience of both genders. In addition, the study included participants whose distant partners did not reside in the same country, including romantic relationships that operated across various countries and even continents. During recruitment, it was also possible to establish which social media platforms the participants tend to use actively, as it may expand further analysis of the results and enables categorization.

Table 3 Couples participating in the study.

Couple Identifier	Participant Identifier	Age	Distance Between Partners (reflected by country of residence)	Facebook	Instagram
Couple 1	Participant 1	28	Australia	X	X
	Participant 2	27	Poland	X	X
Couple 2	Participant 3	27	Ecuador	X	X
	Participant 4	32	the US	X	
Couple 3	Participant 5	28	England	X	X
	Participant 6	35	Poland		X
Couple 4	Participant 7	26	Netherlands	X	X
	Participant 8	26	Belgium	X	X
Couple 5	Participant 9	25	Portugal	X	X
	Participant 10	30	the US	X	X
Couple 6	Participant 11	24	South Africa		X
	Participant 12	26	Portugal	X	X
Couple 7	Participant 13	26	Poland	X	X
	Participant 14	37	Brazil	X	X
Couple 8	Participant 15	26	Netherlands	X	X
	Participant 16	29	Germany	X	X
Couple 9	Participant 17	27	Germany	X	X
	Participant 18	27	Poland	X	X

Table 4 Individuals participating in the study.

Participant Identifier	Age	Country of residence	Partner's country of residence	Facebook	Instagram
Participant 19	21	Indonesia	Germany	X	X
Participant 20	27	Portugal	Italy		X
Participant 21	35	Poland	Brazil	X	X
Participant 22	28	Netherlands	Czech Republic	X	X
Participant 23	27	Portugal	Brazil	X	X

Participant 24	25	Poland	South Africa	X	X
Participant 25	25	England	Belgium		X
Participant 26	22	Slovakia	Poland	X	X
Participant 27	33	New Zealand	Poland	X	X

4.3.2. OVERVIEW OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW METHOD

Knapp & Daly (2011) compared the interview method to the “activity of everyday talk” (p. 65), as the authors argued that this method is based on the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, specifically, it is a conversation based on asking and replying to the questions. Islam & Aldaihani (2022) explained that the primary purpose of interviews is “to explore the experiences, views, opinions, ideas, beliefs, or/and motivations of entities/individuals on particular objects, issues, or phenomena” (p. 5). Islam & Aldaihani argued that interviews are one of the most prevalent techniques in qualitative studies, allowing investigators to deal with sensitive themes, as participants may freely share their thoughts and opinions. According to Islam & Aldaihani (2022), there are three types of interviews, namely structured, semi-structured, and unstructured and their characteristics are shown in Figure 5.

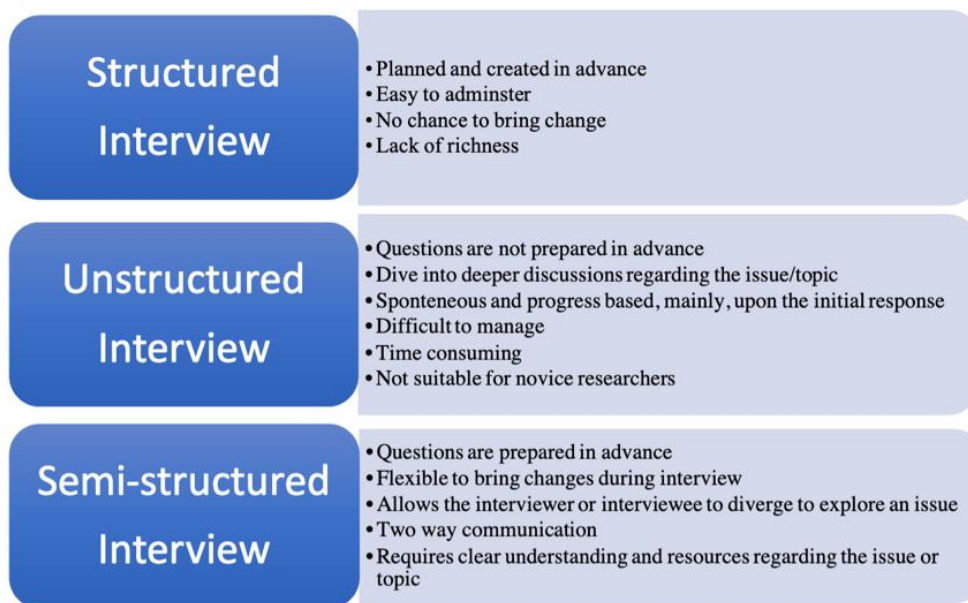


Figure 5 Various types of interviews. Retrieved from Islam, M. A., & Aldaihani, F. M. F. (2022). Justification for adopting qualitative research method, research approaches, sampling strategy, sample size, interview method, saturation, and data analysis.

Dowling et al. (2015) highlighted that the qualitative interview method is commonly applied to research with a focus on individuals' personal and social aspects, as this form of examination allows for "understanding interpretations, experiences and spatialities of social life" (p. 680). Considering romantic connections, Kouamé & Liu (2020) pointed out that interviews serve as the dominant method for gathering data on emotions, since they enable participants to convey their feelings and emotional experiences to the investigator.

Bjørnholt & Farstad (2012) investigated studies involving couples and they delved into the topic of the application of qualitative methods. They were highly supportive of employing joint interviews as the main method of studying couples. Bjørnholt & Farstad (2012) argued that interviews conducted with both partners "provide a common reflective space" (p. 17) and support the depth of collected data "in terms of extensions and corroborations, as well as in bringing disagreements to the floor" (p. 17). Taylor & de Vocht (2011) debated whether it is more effective to apply joint interviews or individual interviews in research involving couples. According to them, joint interviews are characterised by collective narration because participants have the opportunity to jointly build the collective answer, whether it is based on agreement or disagreement. Moreover, they also argued that joint interviews offer several benefits to the researcher, as interviewees "can probe, correct, challenge, or introduce fresh themes for discussion that can result in further disclosure and richer data" (p. 1577). Taylor & de Vocht (2011) pointed out that individual interviews enable participants to state their individual perspectives with greater ease, highlighting the unique thoughts and opinions of each one.

4.3.3. DATA COLLECTION

The semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main method for data collection. According to Leavy (2020), when compared to structured interviews, semi-structured ones can maximise the process of generating rich findings by offering greater flexibility in the conversations between researcher and participant. This format of interviews was beneficial for the study, since it allowed for a flexible yet guided dialogue, at the same time encouraging participants to express their experiences and perspectives on their relationships.

In total 18 interviews took place, out of which 9 were joint interviews with couples involved in LDRs and another 9 interviews were conducted with individuals who are engaged in the same type of relationship. The decision to interview both couples and individuals, was made based on the ongoing debate in academia whether joint or separate interviews are more effective for studying couples. As evident in the literature, both methods of interviewing have advantages, such as allowing to discover individual and shared experiences (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2012; Taylor & de Vocht, 2011).

The interviews took place between June 23 and July 14, 2024. Each individual interview lasted approximately 1 hour while joint interviews were slightly longer in order to gather information from both partners. All participants were familiarised with the relevance of the study, its format, and its aims before the interviews started. The interviews were conducted online through Zoom and recorded. The choice of Zoom was intentional, as the findings of Archibald et al. (2019) study indicated that “Zoom may serve as a highly suitable platform for collecting qualitative interview data when compared to other commonly used VoIP technologies” (p. 7).

The interviews were structured to align with the objectives of the research and divided into seven sections. Each section was grounded in previously conducted studies on social media and romantic relationships. A complete list of questions for the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

1. Relationship Characteristics

Objective:

To analyse demographic differences in connection to social media usage and LDRs.

Rationale:

Pistole et al. (2010) mentioned that long-distance romantic relationships consist of partners who decided to live in different geographical locations and periodically come together. Harris & Edwards (2014) argued that this type of relationships is becoming more common. Yet the literature does not cover sample diversity and the cross-findings based on diverse location of participants, time difference between partners, etc.

Sample questions:

“How many times per year do you see each other in person?”

“What are the reasons for your separation?”

“What is the time difference between your and your partner’s location?”

2. **Communication Patterns and Social Media Usage**

Objective:

To examine communication patterns and social media usage among long-distance romantic partners.

Rationale:

Gutzmann (2018) argued that social media platforms serve as means of communication and enable individuals involved in LDRs to “connect instantaneously with ease” (p. 51). Another recent study showed that two-thirds of adults in committed relationships state that smartphones and social media platforms are essential aspects of their daily routine (National University, 2024).

Sample questions:

“How often do you use Instagram and/or Facebook to communicate with your partner?”

“What type of content do you share with your partner on social media platforms?”

3. **Perception of Cyberspace and Partner’s Presence**

Objective:

To understand participants’ perception of cyberspace and the online presence of their partners (feeling of partners’ co-presence).

Rationale:

Biocca et al. (2003) defined social presence theory as the sensation of being together with other individuals within the virtual world. Gooch & Watts (2014) argued that the communication between distant partners relies strongly on social media platforms since it can give the feeling of a partner’s co-presence. Kolozsvari (2015) pointed out that distant partners are not able to share real space and consequently they perceive cyberspace as their collective space.

Sample questions:

“Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?”

“Do you think that social media have the power to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?”

4. Emotional Expression and Intimacy

Objective:

To assess if social media platforms can sustain emotional expression and intimacy among participants.

Rationale:

Moss & Schwebel (1993) argued that sustaining intimacy between partners “exerts a profound influence on their social development, personal adjustment, and physical health” (p. 31). Fox et al. (2013) highlighted that social media has the power not only to communicate with a partner, but also to communicate the love between partners to the world. Slatcher et al. (2008) pointed out that instant messaging is characterised by certain levels of anonymity, which allow individuals to sustain emotional expressions more effectively than face-to-face communication.

Sample questions:

“Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner?”

“Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?”

5. Opportunities Facilitated by Social Media

Objective:

To explore the opportunities facilitated by social media in sustaining a connection between distant partners

Rationale:

Gomillion et al. (2017) mentioned that the integration of social networks into romantic relationship is crucial for partners to create shared social identity, while Blair & Holmberg (2008) stated that relationships are not isolated entities but are embedded within broader social constructs and can be reflected through social media. Chae (2024) mentioned that new technologies enable distant partners to participate in online shared activities, which help to generate shared memories despite the distance.

Sample questions:

“Have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage in joint activities with your partner?”

“In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?”

6. Negative Aspects of Social Media Usage

Objective:

To identify negative effects of social media usage, such as jealousy or technological distraction, on long-distance partners.

Rationale:

Campbell & Stanton (2019) highlighted that trust is a core element of a secure romantic connection. Norton & Baptist (2014) found that couples tend to set certain boundaries while utilizing social networking sites because of trust issues. Moreover, Roberts & David (2016) suggested that distraction caused by technology may interfere with romantic relationships, as “cell phone-related distractions could lead to lower levels of satisfaction with one’s romantic partner” (p. 135).

Sample questions:

“Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner’s social media interactions?”

“Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel?”

7. General Relationship Satisfaction and Social Media

Objective:

To investigate the connection between general relationship satisfaction and social media usage.

Rationale:

Delle (2021) argued that previous literature presents numerous inconsistent findings, which indicate both positive and negative effects of social media on romantic relationships.

Sample questions:

“How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?”

“Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?”

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The data analysis procedures for this research on LDRs included numerous steps to ensure accuracy and understanding of participants' perspectives. All steps taken for qualitative data analysis were aligned with the pattern outlined by Graue (2015), who defined this action as "a process of the description, classification and interconnection of phenomena with the researcher's concepts" (p. 8). Interviews were conducted with 9 couples and 9 individuals in long-distance romantic relationships, resulting in a total of 18 interviews. All of the interviews were life-recorded via Zoom to capture the full context of each conversation.

After completing the interviews, the audio recordings were processed using the SpeakApp mobile application, which transcribes voice recordings into text. This step was important for transformation of spoken words into a written form that could be further analysed. In addition, the SpeakApp application automatically translated a few of the interviews that were done in languages other than English. Once transcribed, all of the interviews were copied and pasted to ChatGPT in order to correct linguistic and grammatical errors. The commands used for ChatGPT sounded as follow: 'please review and correct any grammatical or linguistic errors in the interview transcript'. The research of Taylor (2024) suggested that ChatGPT should be seen by the researchers as an effective tool, which greatly improves the efficiency of 'cleaning' data from interviews. As reflected in the results of Taylor's research, "ChatGPT did not make a single punctuation error, suggesting that this technology may automatically write grammatically correct" (p. 158). Nevertheless, the transcripts were later manually checked and reviewed to ensure that all corrections were accurate and that the integrity of the participants' responses was kept.

All of the transcripts were further organized into a structured table format (see. Figure 6).

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?]	Participant 14: We've been together for 3 years now.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 13: We live in different countries. The distance is between Poland and Brazil. Participant 14: It surely requires more planning compared to normal relationships.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 14: We manage to see each other roughly three times annually. Participant 13: We mostly alternate between visiting each other's countries and sometimes meet in other places.

Figure 6 Structured table format with transcript of interviews.

In these tables, the left column contained the interview questions, while the right column was dedicated to the corresponding answers from each individual or couples. This process ensured that all responses were clearly linked to its respective questions, facilitating easier analysis. The data within mentioned tables were categorized into seven distinct categories, based on a deductive coding approach. Haug et al. (2021) stated that in deductive coding, “codes are founded in theories or hypothesis and are defined a priori” (p. 433). In other words, the codes are predetermined based on research objectives and theoretical framework, while data is being assigned to these predefined categories. For this research, each category corresponded to the previously established interview sections. The established categories were: Relationship Characteristics, Communication Patterns and Social Media Usage, Perception of Cyberspace and Partner’s Presence, Emotional Expression and Intimacy, Opportunities Facilitated by Social Media, Negative Aspects of Social Media Usage, and General Relationship Satisfaction and Social Media. In addition, each category included specific sub-themes in order to create more detailed coding. As an example, within the category of “Negative Aspects of Social Media Usages”, sub-themes such as “technological distraction” and “jealousy” were identified for coding responses that discussed particular issues excising in literature.

To further expand the analysis, a colour-coding method was introduced. Bianco et al. (2014) explained that colour coding can be described as “associating a set of colours with a set of

items to express the significance of each” (p. 85). Following this approach, colour coding was applied to this research. As an example, in the section of “Communication Patterns and Social Media Usage”, responses indicating that participants primarily used smartphones to communicate were highlighted in green (see. Figure 7), while those who primarily used laptops were marked in red. In the category of “Emotional Expression and Intimacy”, responses from individuals and couples who felt that social media positively impact their emotional expression were highlighted in yellow, whereas those with a negative view were marked in blue. This visual approach facilitated the identification of themes and patterns within each category. Nevertheless, the colour-coding was not applied to the first section, namely Relationship Characteristics, as it dealt with more general information about the relationship and the demographics of participants, which did not require thematic categorization.

6. What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner?	<p>Participant 1: We mainly use our smartphones.</p> <p>Participant 2: Yes, both of us rely on our smartphones for communication.</p>
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Figure 7 Example of colour-coding for the interview with Participant 1 and Participant 2.

After colour-coding was applied, the next step involved gathering the responses of the same colour and categorizing them within an Excel sheet (see. Figure 8).

Category	Emotional Expression and Intimacy	
Sub-theme	Perspective on social media and expression of emotions	
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Answers	Participant 24: there's certainly the possibility to express emotions	Participant 1: nothing compares to face-to-face interaction.
	Participant 21: social media definitely help us maintain some level of emotional intimacy	Particiapant 18: to some extent, I can express emotions through social media, but it's not as satisfying as in real life.
	Participant 4: the constant communication and sharing make us feel closer and emotionally connected.	Participant 22: I think it's easier in person because you can express your emotions in a more direct way.

Figure 8 Example of colour-coded thematic categorization table.

This sheet was structured to include various categories and sub-themes that corresponded to the literature. By grouping the colour-coded responses together, the Excel sheet allowed for a clear and organised visualization of how participants’ opinions aligned with each category

and sub-theme. This action helped to facilitate the efficiency of the research in two ways. Firstly, it provided easier access to specific responses during the analysis and pointed out which responses align with existing theories. Secondly, this method allowed to quantify how many participants shared similar views within each sub-theme. By calculating these responses, it became possible to see which existing theories are more prevalent or confirmed by the participants' answers.

4.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All of the participants received information about the research's purpose and the procedure of collecting data was explained to them in detail. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D), highlighting that they could withdraw from the study at any point. This information was emphasised at the beginning of the interviews. Considering privacy and the emotional nature of investigating romantic relationships, all personal identifiers were removed from the data and replaced with unique codes (Participant 1, Participant 2, ...).

5. RESULTS

5.1. STUDY POPULATION AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

This section demonstrates the demographic results from the interviews, highlighting a diverse group of participants in LDRs, with a mix of genders, sexual orientations, and ages ranging from 21 to 37. The interviewees' relationships varied in duration, geographic location, and how they met their partners, providing a comprehensive insight of LDR experiences, as described below.

A total of 27 individuals participated in the study, through 18 interviews. Nine of these interviews were conducted with individuals, and another nine with couples involved LDRs. The participants included 15 women and 12 men, with ages ranging from 21 to 37 years old. While a majority of participants were in heterosexual relationships, three participants were in homosexual relationships. Considering social media usage, four participants indicated that

they did not have Facebook accounts, and one interviewee did not have an Instagram account, however, every participant had at least one of these platforms.

All participants were in LDRs, with partners residing in different countries, which offered a unique perspective on the challenges they face when maintaining relationships across national borders. Among individual participants, five were in relationships within Europe, and four were in intercontinental relationships. Among the nine couples interviewed, four were in relationships in which both partners resided within Europe, while five were in intercontinental relationships. Consequently, 13 participants resided on the same continent as their partner, while 14 participants were living on a different continent than their partner.

The duration of relationships that participants were involved in varies, with the shortest being 1 year (Participant 26), while three couples indicated being in long distance for around 1.5 years. Nevertheless, a majority of participants had been in LDRs between 2 and 3 years (eighteen participants in total). Only one couple indicated being in a relationship for longer, specifically 4 years (two participants in total), however this couple lived together for one year in between.

The way in which participants met their partners also differed, as six couples and five individuals met their partners face-to-face, while three couples and three individuals met online, either through dating apps or social media. As an example, Participant 1 stated, “*we met online, on Tinder, while I was traveling around Europe*” (Appendix E, Interview I), while Participant 23 said, “*we met online through a mutual friend on Facebook, and it took about a year before we finally met in person*” (Appendix E, Interview XIV). In addition, Participant 20 reported that she met her partner face-to-face, but after losing contact, they reconnected through Instagram.

Considering the frequency of in-person meetings, for partners residing within Europe it ranged from every 1 to 2 months, demonstrating a somewhat manageable distance for travel. On the contrary, those in intercontinental relationships met every 3 to 4 months. Nevertheless, some of the participants mentioned that once they see each other, they spend the whole month together, so all together they spend around 3 to 4 months together over a one-year period.

The primary reasons for maintaining a LDR included education and work. Fifteen participants stated that education was the main reason, while for another 12 participants it was work. However, several participants also mentioned a combination of factors, such as family obligations or commitment to friends.

The final question in the first section of the interviews asked participants to generally assess their greatest struggle in maintaining a LDR. A clear pattern was visible, as the vast majority of responses was centred around the issues with communication, feeling of longing, or feeling of missing out. As an example, Participant 22 stated “*The main issue in our relationship is definitely longing, especially those moments when you just want to hug or do something together, but you can't because of the distance*”. (Appendix E, Interview XIII). In case of the feeling of missing out, Participant 26 stated that:

“The hardest part is not being there for the small, everyday moments. When something great or challenging happens, we can't immediately hug or celebrate together, and sometimes the time zone difference means waiting hours for a response” (Appendix E, Interview XVII).

In total, there were three couples and two individuals who considered communication to be the biggest struggle. As reflected by Participants 3 and 4 in their joint interview: “*it is not about misunderstandings, but mostly about managing time to communicate in a proper way and devoting enough time for my partner*” (Appendix E, Interview II). Lastly, nine participants noted finances as one of the challenges of being in a LDR. For example, Participant 8 shared, “*Traveling from one country to another twice a month puts quite a strain on our bank accounts, especially with the current ticket prices*” (Appendix E, Interview IV).

5.2. COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

The second part of the interviews focused on communication patterns and the utilization of social media platforms by partners involved in LDRs. It investigates how participants engage with each other daily, the types of content and features they use to communicate, and the significance of shared humour through memes. Certain patterns emerged, such as the

frequent use of social media and its features for communication between partners, the central role of memes in maintaining connection, and the fact that smartphones are the primary tool for communication in LDRs.

The second part of the interviews focused on communication patterns and the utilization of social media platforms. When interviewees were asked to describe a typical day of using social media to communicate with their partners, a visible trend emerged, as seven individuals and six couples emphasized the morning as the start of their conversations via direct message function on social media. For example, Participant 19 stated “*It starts when I wake up. I immediately send a quick message on Facebook such as ‘good morning’ or ‘did you sleep well?’*” (Appendix E, Interview X). Similarly, Couple 1 shared, “*we start our day with good morning messages and stay connected throughout the day*” (Appendix E, Interview I). Both couples and individual participants indicated that they use social media to communicate with their partners on a daily basis. In particular, eight individuals and five couples reported that they use both Facebook and Instagram to communicate with their partners. One individual and two couples use Instagram but not Facebook, while two couples exclusively use Facebook and do not use Instagram for daily communication. Although the research primarily concerns Facebook and Instagram, a notable finding is that seven couples and all individual participants (nine in total) also use WhatsApp for communication with their partners. This may suggest that WhatsApp also plays a significant role in daily communication between long-distance romantic partners. In addition, two individuals mentioned using TikTok, while one couple, namely Participant 15 and Participant 16, stated that they use both TikTok and the application BeReal. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the majority of participants, who use more than one platform, use the platforms in a supplementary manner. As an example, Participant 5 stated:

“We use Instagram daily for chatting, video calls, and sharing updates. Occasionally, we use WhatsApp for long voice calls, for example when we buy the flight tickets, or exchange some more private data” (Appendix E, Interview III).

The couple who mentioned BeReal highlighted that they do not use BeReal for direct communication, as Participant 16 stated that “*it doesn't have many communication features, but we can see what each of us is doing at a given moment*” (Appendix E, Interview XIII).

Considering the devices used for communication with partners, 22 participants indicated that they primarily use smartphones, while five of the interviewees mentioned using both smartphones and laptops. However, those who also use laptops highlighted that this only happens in certain situations. Four of these participants use laptops for video calls at home. As Participant 27 explained, “*sometimes in the morning or evening when we have a video call, I prefer to call from my laptop simply because the screen is bigger*” (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). In addition, one of the participants uses the laptop only for Facebook chat during working hours in the office.

In terms of the specific features of Instagram and Facebook, all participants reported using mentioned social media platforms for exchanging text messages on direct message chat function, and 25 participants indicated that they use the video chat function. Participant 19, who does not use the video chat function on Facebook or Instagram, reported using other applications for video calls. In addition, four couples and four individuals stated that they exchange voice messages and Couple 3 reported using voice calls function on Instagram, as they stated “*it happens that we call each other over Instagram for quick chats*” (Appendix E, Interview III). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that only Couple 3 reported using voice calls, which suggests that a majority of participants use other channels for this type of interactions. Lastly, all participants reported exchanging various content with their partners on Facebook and Instagram. Regarding the type of content shared by partners on social media, a majority of participants reported sharing photos, videos, text messages, instant photos and videos, and voice notes. In addition, six participants mentioned that they exchange links to interesting online articles via direct messages on Facebook and Instagram.

The interviews clearly depicted the importance of memes for partners involved in LDRs. Twenty-five participants indicated that they regularly exchange memes with their partners on Facebook and/or Instagram. Only one couple does not practice this on a regular basis. One partner in this couple stated, “*We use Instagram for this, but it doesn't happen very often*” (Appendix E, Interview VII), while his partner added, “*I agree, but I don't think that it is important part of our relationship*” (Appendix E, Interview VII). In contrast, the rest of the participants not only emphasized that they frequently share memes but also highlighted the importance of memes in their relationships. Six participants also connected the topic of

memes to coping with the distance between them and their partners. They emphasized that sharing memes helps to fill the gap of laughing together, despite the fact that they reside in different parts of the world. For example, Participant 25 mentioned, *“it is a nice way to express our humour when we are separated by distance”* (Appendix E, Interview XVI), and Participant 8 shared, *“we don't have that many opportunities to laugh together in person, so at least we send each other memes to fill that need for humour”* (Appendix E, Interview IV). Five participants reported during the interviews that some memes they send to their partners are shared exclusively with them, as their partners understand their unique sense of humour and others might not fully grasp the jokes. Participant 6 explained, *“sometimes I send specific memes only to my boyfriend because I have quite a dark sense of humour, and I know he won't take it seriously like others might”* (Appendix E, Interview III), and Participant 17 shared, *“I must admit, we share a very specific type of humour, and there are many memes that I would only send to my partner and not to others”* (Appendix E, Interview IX). In addition, four interviews disclosed a more sentimental role of meme-sharing, where the memes are directly aimed at the partner because they reference certain situations from their shared past or represent affection. As an example, Participant 27 expressed, *“the memes we send refer to specific situations from our past or relate to our conversations”* (Appendix E, Interview XVIII), while Participant 20 mentioned, *“sharing something funny that makes us think of each other is a way of saying, 'I was thinking about you,' which helps us feel connected”* (Appendix E, Interview XI).

5.3. PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

The third section of interviews investigated participant's opinions on their perception of cyberspace and examined the role of Facebook and Instagram in perception of their partner's presence. The positive impact of online interactions in bridging the gap of physical distance, the use of video calls to create a sense of connection, and the view of cyberspace as a shared space emerged as key patterns. These central themes, as well as participants' motivations for engaging in offline activities inspired by social media, are discussed in detail below.

When participants were asked whether they believe social media can bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another, three couples and five

individuals shared a positive view. Their responses suggested that social media indeed have the ability to foster the sense of closeness despite physical distance. For example, Participant 21 stated,

“What else could bridge that gap if not online communication, which mainly happens on social media? It might not be a perfect solution, but it’s definitely better than old-school calls and messaging” (Appendix E, Interview XII),

and Participant 3 expressed that using social media *“creates a sense of closeness that makes the distance more bearable”* (Appendix E, Interview II). In addition, seven of the interviewees who shared positive opinion about the topic, indicated that social media help to maintain the feeling of closeness because of the variety of features, such as video chat, or photos sharing. Nevertheless, three interviewees reported that social media does not have the ability to bridge the gap of distance, as highlighted by Participant 27, *“it certainly helps maintain the relationship, but it definitely doesn’t eliminate the feeling of distance”* (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). Another 10 participants expressed mix feelings considering social media impact on this matter. They all mentioned that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance to some extent, but it doesn’t fully eliminate the feeling of distance.

Following the topic of perception of presence and connection, participants were asked whether seeing their partner active on Facebook or Instagram influences their sense of closeness. Fourteen interviewees felt that seeing their partner active on social media positively impacts their sense of closeness. Majority of those who expressed positive opinion on the topic explained that the main reason for that is the availability and perceived presence. In particular, Participant 23 stated, *“It makes me feel like he is just a click away”* (Appendix E, Interview XIV), and Participant 11 mentioned, *“it makes me feel like he is there and he can respond whenever I need it”* (Appendix E, Interview VI). In contrast, 12 participants decided that seeing partner active on social media does not have an impact on their sense of closeness, while one participant remained neutral on the matter.

The third question in this section of interviews was aimed to discover the certain interactions between long-distance partners that make them feel particularly close or connected. Based on the responses, certain patterns emerged. Notably, nine interviewees reported that they feel very much close or connected during video calls, with one couple highlighting that this

includes falling asleep while still being connected on a video chat. As mentioned by one of the partners (Participant 16), *“It’s very nice when we lie in our beds with the lights off and talk until one of us falls asleep. It almost feels like we’re in the same bed”* (Appendix E, Interview VIII). Moreover, five participants indicated that they felt very connected when their partner posted a photo depicting them as a couple on Facebook or/and Instagram. For some, these posts were a way to communicate publicly that they are in a relationship, while for others, these posts marked special occasion such as celebrating anniversary, or visiting partner in his/her country for the first time.

Considering the perception of cyberspace, participants were asked if they see cyberspace as a shared space with their partners. Twenty-two participants reported that the cyberspace is a shared space in their relationship, highlighting that a significant amount of their interactions takes place in virtual world. For example, Participant 19 mentioned, *“Our relationship spans two continents and half the world separates us, so our shared space is essentially the communication that takes place online”* (Appendix E, Interview X). Moreover, several participants during the interviews compared the cyberspace to a physical space that they are currently unable to share because of the distance. As expressed by Participant 23, *“Cyberspace is like our virtual living room — a place where we can hang out, share our thoughts”* (Appendix E, Interview XIV). Only four participants disagreed with the idea that cyberspace serves as a shared space for their relationship. Participant 10 expressed negative opinion about this topic and mentioned, *“I’d rather not even think about it because then it feels like our relationship is more virtual than real”* (Appendix E, Interview V).

The last two questions from this section focused on planning real-life events based on content seen on social media and the motivation driven by social media posting to attend such events or activities. Only one couple reported not using social media for planning real-life events, while the rest (25 participants) use social media to get inspiration for places to visit or activities that they can attend. The responses from interviews showed clear division into three main categories, as majority of participants use social media to search for local events and activities, or discover restaurants and cafes or search for travel content and inspirations. In total, four couples and four individual participants use Facebook and/or Instagram to find local events and music festivals. For example, Participant 16 stated, *“We*

love concerts and music festivals. We often check where an artist we like will be playing or we discover new festivals through Instagram” (Appendix E, Interview VIII). Similarly, four couples and four individuals check restaurants and cafes profiles, as expressed by Participant 13, *“I also check a lot of restaurants on social media, before we go there. Based on their profiles we can see how food looks like. Also, most of the restaurants post their menu on social media, so we can check the prices etc.”* (Appendix E, Interview VII). Another four couples and three individual participants use mentioned platforms for travel content, such as seeking travel inspirations or checking photos of accommodation. Another important finding is that Instagram is the main platform, from which participants get inspirations to organize real-life events and activities with their partners, as 17 participants clearly stated using Instagram for this purpose.

In connection to the motivation to participate in real-life events, 14 respondents reported that indeed the knowledge they can share it on social media motivates them to engage in such offline activities. Interestingly, a few of the participants emphasised that the main intention is not to show off but to capture the moments of their relationship online. For example, Participant 23 mentioned,

“Knowing that we can capture and share our experiences on social media adds an extra layer of excitement to our plans. It's not about showing off; it's about creating memories that we can look back on together” (Appendix E, Interview XIV),

and Participant 3 shared this perspective, saying, *“sharing our moments online makes them more special and allows us to save those memories”* (Appendix E, Interview II). On the other hand, an almost equal number, 13 respondents stated that the possibility to post content on social media does not motivate them at all to take part in offline activities. As an example, Participant 21 stated, *“We just value spending time together, not showing off”* (Appendix E, Interview XII), while Participant 13 said, *“the motivation comes from spending time together, not from sharing it online”* (Appendix E, Interview VII).

5.4. EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

The fourth section of interviews aimed to explore the opinion of long-distance partners on the topic of emotional aspects and intimacy expressed through Instagram and Facebook. Key themes included the significance of emojis and video calls for conveying emotions, as well

as the contrast between expressing emotions in online versus offline environment. In addition, discussions on sexting in LDRs emphasised how couples use it to maintain sexual intimacy despite the distance. Lastly, motivations for sharing their romantic lives online were discussed, revealing notions of commitment, happiness, and challenging societal stereotypes.

The first question was centred around the idea whether distant partners are able to express emotions through social media platforms. Four couples agreed that indeed social media allow them to express emotions, and seven individual participants shared that view. For example, Participant 19 said, *“I believe that even something as simple as liking a message is a way of expressing emotions”* (Appendix E, Interview X). Interestingly, for those who stated that they can express emotions through social media, emojis emerged as an important tool for communication. In total, 12 out of 27 interviewees mentioned using emojis as a way to show affection, as expressed by Participant 24: *“We often send each other heart or hugging emojis. It's nice to receive such messages”* (Appendix E, Interview XV). Additionally, several participants mentioned that the video chat function is the easiest way to express emotions and facilitates expressing emotions better than other features of social media. For example, Participant 16 stated, *“video chat is the main feature that lets us express emotions”* (Appendix E, Interview VIII), while Participant 15 said, *“We can definitely express emotions during video calls on Instagram. For me, text messages are not enough; I need to hear and see him, and this feature allows me to do that”* (Appendix E, Interview VIII). Considering those who said social media platforms do not allow them to express emotions, or at least not fully, many responses focused on the lack of gestures and physical presence. Participant 9 shared:

“There's the option to chat, record voice messages, or make a video call, so we can express emotions with words. However, I miss the closeness, gestures, and physicality” (Appendix E, Interview V).

Participant 18 expressed a similar opinion, stating:

“I think emotions are expressed both through words and gestures. In the case of social media, we can definitely express emotions through words, but not gestures. There is a difference between seeing someone on photo or during a video chat and physically hugging them” (Appendix E, Interview IX).

In addition, several participants compared expressing emotions through social media and expressing emotions in real life. Their answers indicated that social media was ranked below face-to-face interactions when it comes to emotional expression. As an example, Participant 7 said,

“The question is whether such an expression of emotion is enough. Of course, I send a lot of affectionate messages, and I also send heart or hug emojis, but it's not the same as expressing emotions in real life” (Appendix E, Interview IV).

Another question of the interviews aimed to discover whether participants prefer to express their emotions in an online or offline environment, and in which setting it is easier for them express them. Only one couple stated that they prefer to express emotions online, rather than offline, as one of the partners said, *“we have more time to think before we reply”* (Appendix E, Interview III), and it was confirmed by her boyfriend who stated, *“I agree, online interactions always give us time to cool down in conflict situations”* (Appendix E, Interview VIII). Fourteen participants clearly emphasised that expressing emotions is easier in an offline environment. They pointed out that face-to-face interactions allow them to read body language and engage in affectionate physical gestures, which they consider key advantages. As an example, Participant 10 said, *“Nothing can replace holding hands, hugging, or even a kiss on the forehead”* (Appendix E, Interview V). Nevertheless, other reasons also emerged. Two participants pointed out that they struggle with effective expression of emotions in a virtual world and face this challenge on a regular basis. One of them stated, *“Sometimes my boyfriend even accuses me of not being emotional enough, but I just can't express emotions through messages”* (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). Another interviewee stated that expressing emotions face-to-face *“feels more natural”* (Appendix E, Interview VII). The remaining 11 interviewees were more hesitant in their responses, as they acknowledged the advantages of both online and offline emotional expression. It is important to mention that a clear tendency emerged among their reflections, as 10 of the 11 participants highlighted that it depends on the situation and the type of emotions they wish to express. Specifically, all of them suggested that expressing positive emotions is better and more pleasant offline, as evident in the answer of Participant 22, *“When it comes to positive emotions, like saying 'I love you' or 'I care about you,' it's definitely more pleasant and easier face to face”* (Appendix E, Interview XIII). On the contrary, the same respondents stated that negative emotions, especially those connected to conflict situations, are easier to express

online, as it gives them time to calm down and reflect on their messages. For example, Participant 17 noted, “*communication on social media gives me time for reflection and to think over my answers*” (Appendix E, Interview IX), while Participant 22 said, “*When we argue over chat, each of us has a moment to think about our responses, delete messages, and write a new, better one. It also gives us a chance to calm down and process the issue rationally*” (Appendix E, Interview XIII).

Participants were asked about their attitudes toward sexting and whether they engage in sexting with their partners on Facebook and/or Instagram. Only four participants—two couples—indicated that they do not engage in sexting. The remaining couples, as well as all individual interviewees, indicated that they sext with their distant partners. For the couples who do not practice sexting, one couple pointed out concerns over privacy and online security, while the other couple said that while they used to sext in the past, they no longer feel the need to engage in sexting anymore because they see one another more frequently and their sexual needs are fulfilled during reunions.

The interviews with participants who confirmed that they engage in sexting with their partners, showed specific findings, as a majority of the participants expressed clear reasons for their use of sexting. First of all, four couples and three individuals mentioned that their main motivation is the way sexting builds tension before partners reunite in person. As many of them described, it improves desire for one another and creates a sense of excitement. For example, Participant 15 shared, “*it creates a sense of tension, and I get even more excited before meeting, knowing there's something to look forward to*” (Appendix E, Interview VIII), while Participant 26 mentioned that sexting helps to “*build tension before seeing each other. It adds excitement to our relationship and enhances our sexual life when we meet*” (Appendix E, Interview XVII). Another important finding was that four couples and six individuals stated that they practice sexting because it fulfils the sexual needs that cannot be filled in person due to distance. Participant 22 emphasised that it is common for people involved in LDRs and stated, “*'normal' couples have many more moments of closeness and physical intimacy, which we don't have, so we have to replace it with something*” (Appendix E, Interview XIII). The last motivation considered visual aspects, as one couple and one individual participant highlighted the importance of visualizing their partner in maintaining sexual satisfaction, as expressed by Participant 26: “*sometimes I have a feeling that I don't*

remember the body of my girlfriend, but she keeps me posted with some photos and immediately the memory comes back” (Appendix E, Interview XVII). Furthermore, one couple and Participant 27 said that they do not sext as often as they did at the beginning of their relationship, saying that their need for sexual connection was much stronger in the past. It is particularly interesting since both the aforementioned couple and the participant have been in a relationship for 1.5 and 2 years, which is shorter time than the majority of the other interviewees.

The last findings of this section analysed whether partners openly share their relationship on Facebook and/or Instagram, and what motivates them to share their romantic life online. Seventeen participants said they share their romantic life online. A majority of those respondents reported posting photos depicting their partners on Instagram and/or Facebook or updating their relationship status on Facebook. Some of them indicated doing both. One couple and one individual participant reported not showing their partners on their social media profile, because they prefer to keep their life private. Two couples showed disagreement in this matter, namely Couple 1 and Couple 9. In these cases, one of the partners reported posting content about their relationship, while another partner did not engage in such practices or did it rarely. As an example, one of the partners stated, *“I share occasionally, such as the post about our anniversary, but I prefer to keep most moments private”* (Appendix E, Interview I), while his partner responded, *“I am the opposite. I share a lot about us to show our happiness”* (Appendix E, Interview I).

The data from the responses also revealed a recurring trend concerning the motivation for showing relationships on social media. The most frequent response, expressed by 14 participants, was that by posting content depicting their romantic partners, couples highlight that they are in a relationship, in other words they are ‘taken’, which may discourage potential individuals who might be interested in them. As an example, Participant 22 shared, *“it’s a way to set boundaries for others—if any interested girl were to visit my profile, she would immediately see that I am taken. The same goes for my girlfriend”* (Appendix E, Interview XIII), while Participant 6 expressed, *“I like to show others that I am taken... I believe that it limits conflict situations within our relationship”* (Appendix E, Interview III). Another motivation was to show happiness to the world. Eight participants simply said that they are happy so there is no reason to hide it. Their responses were centred around the idea

of sharing happiness and being open about joy coming from their relationships. Seven interviewees noted that posting such content on social media demonstrates commitment to their partners, and three couples stated that through these actions they update their friends and family about their relationship and shared life. In addition, two participants mentioned challenging stereotypes through posting their relationship. Yet the stereotypes explained by them concerned different matters, as Participant 23 expressed, “*there is also a deeper meaning behind it — being in a homosexual relationship, I feel proud to openly share who I love and who I am, without fear*” (Appendix E, Interview XIV), while Participant 27 shared, “*when I told my closest friends that my boyfriend is from New Zealand, everyone immediately assumed our relationship was doomed...in a way, we are challenging stereotypes and showing others that we are happy despite the distance*” (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). Lastly, Participant 11 added that she posts photos of her partner for personal reasons: it allows her to view the history of their relationship and revisit it whenever she wants. As she said, “*I love showcasing my relationship and special moments. It’s like creating a digital love story. I love looking at our photos*” (Appendix E, Interview VI).

5.5. OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

The fifth section of the interviews was focused on examining the perception of participants on the topic of opportunities provided by social media, namely participating in online joint activities, creating virtual shared social networks, utilization of instant messaging features. In addition, it aimed to examine whether participants recognize these opportunities and take advantage of them. It was evident that several partners involved in LDRs recognize these opportunities and engage in behaviours such as creating shared networks of friends and planning online joint activities. Moreover, instant messaging was considered essential for facilitating continuous communication.

Firstly, a majority of participants, specifically eight couples and five individual participants, reported that they organize joint activities online with their distant partners with the use of features of Instagram and/or Facebook, such as virtual dates. One couple and three individual participants said that they do not organise online joint activities, and Participant 27 shared that sometimes it happens but it is not planned, as she said, “*I wouldn’t call it planning, but sometimes it happens that, for example, my boyfriend is preparing breakfast in the kitchen*”

during a video chat, while I'm making a late dinner. We don't plan these situations; they happen naturally" (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). In terms of types of activities, 12 participants reported having online dinners with their partner. Some of the couples start from cooking over a video chat and finish the evening having dinner together, while others prefer to order food delivery simultaneously. For example, Participant 7 said, "*We typically start by cooking together on both sides of the camera and then enjoy dinner and wine together*" (Appendix E, Interview IV), while Participant 16 stated, "*We're not master chefs, so we often order food delivery, eat, and drink beer or wine while on a video chat*" (Appendix E, Interview XIII). Four participants reported that they organise such activities during sporting events, when they simultaneously comment on athletes' performances or cheer together. Participant 8 shared, "*when there are major sporting events, like tennis or football finals, we also connect on a video chat and cheer and comment together*" (Appendix E, Interview IV). Another type of virtual activity was certain occasions, such as Valentine's Day, birthdays, or anniversaries, as Participant 25 said, "*we have virtual dinners on video calls for special occasions like birthdays or Valentine's Day when we can't be together*" (Appendix E, Interview XVI). In addition, one couple and three individual participants reported watching TV shows and movies simultaneously and commenting on them real-time through Instagram or Facebook chat. Considering the main features of social media used to organise joint online activities, 18 participants reported using the video chat feature, while three participants stated that they do such activities over direct message function and exchange messages. For example, Participant 1 shared, "*we often have 'online dates' via video chat on Instagram Direct*" (Appendix E, Interview I), while Participant 19 stated, "*On Instagram and Facebook, we comment in private messages on movies or TV shows we're watching simultaneously*" (Appendix E, Interview X). Some of the participants emphasised the importance of online joint activities and the opportunities of it for long-distance couples, as Participant 13 shared, "*It's a great way to replace physical dates that we can't have on a daily basis*" (Appendix E, Interview VII).

When interviewees were asked whether Instagram or Facebook enables them to create shared networks of friends with their partner, 26 out of 27 participants answered that those social media platforms allow them to create shared networks. Only one participant said that she does not follow her boyfriend's friends on social media. However, she explained that in

their relationship, her boyfriend is the one who visits her, so she had not had many opportunities to meet his friends and add them on Facebook or Instagram. Nevertheless, she stated that her boyfriend does follow her friends, after he met them during visits. Similarly, seven participants mentioned adding friends of their partners after they met in person, while four participants reported that they also follow family members of their partners. Several interviewees mentioned that creating online shared networks helps them stay updated about partner's life, as Participant 1 stated, "*Living so far apart, it's great to have a shared network where we can both feel included and updated on each other's social circles*" (Appendix E, Interview I). Another participant explained that social media gives them the opportunity to stay in touch with people who live in different geographical locations, as she said, "*It feels like we're all connected, even if we're on different continents*" (Appendix E, Interview VI). In addition, six participants directly stated that they do not only follow their partner's friends, but also interact with them through Facebook or Instagram.

As many as 25 participants stated that they definitely feel more comfortable around their partner's close ones if they follow them on social media. As they explained, the main reasons are being up-to-date with their lives and the fact that it provides comfort of conversation, the feeling of familiarity that comes from tracking their online behaviours and the feeling of being included in their partner's social circle. Elaborating on these reasons, several participants emphasised that social media profiles give them an idea of what the person likes, what they are like, and what interests them. Consequently, it becomes easier to start a conversation once they meet. For example, Participant 14 said, "*It helps break the ice when we meet face-to-face*" (Appendix E, Interview VII), while Participant 24 stated, "*I can see more or less what they're interested in daily, so it makes face-to-face conversations easier for me*" (Appendix E, Interview XV). In addition, some of the interviewees mentioned the feeling of being included in shared social circle, as stated by Participant 6, "*I think that because of social media, I felt from the beginning very much included in his social network*" (Appendix E, Interview III). A few other respondents highlighted that following their partner's friends on social media gives them the impression that they know them quite well, as expressed by Participant 11: "*It's like I get a sneak peek into their world*" (Appendix E, Interview VI). Lastly, some of the participants mentioned that following their partner's friends on Facebook and Instagram helps them to maintain a connection despite the distance. As shared by Participant 12,

“With Facebook and Instagram, it’s like we’ve got this virtual bridge between Cape Town and Lisbon. We can follow each other’s friends, tag each other in posts, and even share cool spots from our cities. It’s awesome because I get to see who’s important to my partner, and she gets to know my friends in South Africa” (Appendix E, Interview VI).

Some participants also highlighted that sharing friends with partners can improve relationship satisfaction, while others pointed out that it is important to share the same circle of friends, especially those friends who accept and support their relationship. For example, Participant 7 stated, *“I think mutual friends, especially those who support our relationship, are very important”* (Appendix E, Interview IV), and Participant 27 shared, *“shared friend groups and their acceptance are important in any relationship. At the moment, we can only do this through social media, but it gives me a lot of comfort”* (Appendix E, Interview XVIII).

The next question addressed the importance of instant messaging important for their relationship. Twenty-one participants indicated that they perceive instant messaging as important, as it allows them to stay constantly connected and engage in continuous conversations. As an example, Participant 25 shared, *“It helps us maintain a continuous flow of communication throughout the day”* (Appendix E, Interview XVI). One participant even mentioned that the continuity and flow of conversations gives the impression that someone is actively present on the other end, which may suggest the feeling of their partner’s presence. In addition, Participant 20 stated that instant messaging can help to cope with distance: *“The ability to send quick messages throughout the day helps us feel more connected and makes the distance less overwhelming”* (Appendix E, Interview XI).

Lastly, participants were asked to identify the main advantage of social media for their relationship. The answers were clearly centred around two main opportunities, namely constant communication and variety of communication. Fifteen interviewees reported that in their opinion constant communication is the most important opportunity offered by social media to enhance their relationship, while eight respondents indicated the variety of communication. Participants not only remarked that social media gives them real-time updates about their partner’s whereabouts, but also that it facilitates communication through several features that enable users to create and share content. For example, Participant 22 expressed that for him the main opportunity of social media was, *“The fact that we can*

communicate whenever we want and from any place in the world” (Appendix E, Interview XIII), while Participant 24 stated:

“It's hard to pinpoint one, but I think it's the diversity of communication. We can send photos and videos, either in chat or ones that disappear after a second. We share content that interests us or even products we like, and I ask my girlfriend for her opinion before I buy them. It kind of replaces the general conversations we would have if we lived in the same house” (Appendix E, Interview XV).

5.6. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

The sixth section of the interviews aimed to discover participant’s views on the negative aspects of social media usage, such as jealousy, technological distraction, misunderstandings and conflicts, and coping mechanisms for those problems. Results demonstrate that online interactions often lead to jealousy, particularly interactions regarding ex-partners. In addition, technological distractions were noted among individuals in LDRs, causing frustration among partners, while misunderstandings frequently arose from text-based interactions. Another important finding reveals that despite problems related to social media usage, participants tend to address these issues through video calls and voice messages to resolve conflicts.

Only eight out of 27 participants indicated that they had not experienced jealousy and did not feel jealous due to their partner’s online behaviours. A different opinion was shared by six couples and five individuals, who reported that the problem of jealousy arose in their relationships because of social media usage. In addition, two individual participants stated that it had not happened to them, but their partners were jealous at some point. Interactions with other users through liking photos, leaving comments, or their partner being tagged in photos were identified by seven participants as those that trigger jealousy. For example, Participant 4 said, *“sometimes I feel jealous when I see him commenting on other women's photos”* (Appendix E, Interview II), while Participant 20 shared, *“I've felt jealous in the past, especially when seeing my partner's Instagram stories with certain friends”* (Appendix E, Interview XI). Three participants reported that exchanging direct messages with other users was a reason for them to be jealous, while two other participants stated that interactions with ex-partners caused these negative feelings. Interestingly, two participants reported jealousy

connected to cultural differences, and both participants were in a relationship with partners from Brazil. Participant 21 explained it as follows,

“I think it’s a mix of both social media and cultural differences. I felt there was a huge gap between interactions with friends in Poland—where everyone keeps their distance—and in Brazil—where hugging in photos with friends... is normal” (Appendix E, Interview XII),

and Participant 23 added,

“Brazil has such a sexually expressive culture. When I see my partner engaging with others online, particularly people who are very open and flirtatious, it can stir up feelings of insecurity” (Appendix E, Interview XIV).

The next question focused on participants’ attitudes towards following on Facebook or Instagram ex-partners or individuals with whom they were emotionally engaged in the past and how this impacts their current LDR. The answers of the respondents were divided, as nine participants stated that they do not follow such individuals and do not agree with their partner doing so, while 12 participants said that they follow people from their past. In addition, two individuals said that whether they follow someone or not is based on selection: they admitted that there are certain past connections they are comfortable with, and others that they are not, as mentioned by Participant 25: *“It’s not a general rule, but there are a couple of profiles that we’ve both decided to avoid because of past that might still carry some baggage”* (Appendix E, Interview XVI).

Those participants who chose not to follow their past connections listed several reasons for that. Four participants mentioned the comfort of their partner, while another participant stated that the choice comes from *“the sake of avoiding the risks of unpleasant situations”* (Appendix E, Interview XIV). Participant 19 shared that she does not follow ex partners because it might suggest looking for an alternative, as she explained, *“I kind of feel that keeping up with ex-partners is like creating a backup partner”* (Appendix E, Interview X). Moreover, the interview with one couple revealed that one of the partners follows ex-partners on social media, but this causes conflicts with their partner, who does not accept such behaviours.

The next part of the interviews was centred around the topic of technological distraction. A substantial majority, 17 respondents, noted that they have observed their partner being distracted by their smartphone or social media. Most of these participants expressed feeling

frustrated or ignored in such moments, especially when it occurred during conversations. Participant 3 stated, *“sometimes I feel she is not fully present during our conversations”* (Appendix E, Interview II), and Participant 23 added, *“I’ve felt my partner was more engaged with his phone than with me, especially during our video calls”* (Appendix E, Interview XIV). Another finding is that the participants who do not think that their partner gets distracted by technology present a certain pattern. All of their answers indicate that this issue does not affect them, as they greatly value the time that they spend together, which is limited due to the distance. As an example, Participant 19 shared,

“Given that we have far fewer opportunities to spend time together compared to other couples, phone addiction or looking at the screen instead of having conversations doesn’t affect us” (Appendix E, Interview X).

The interviews also revealed that social media usage can cause misunderstandings or conflicts for long distance partners, as six couples and eight individual interviewees reported experiencing such issues. The vast majority of those who indicated struggling with misunderstanding reported that it mostly happens through text-based communication, namely exchanging text messages over direct message functionality on apps. Sixteen participants mentioned this form of miscommunication and highlighted that they struggle to feel the tone of the messages, which cannot capture gestures or facial expressions. As an example, Participant 1 shared, *“It’s challenging to gauge the other person’s tone and intentions over messages”* (Appendix E, Interview I), and Participant 6 added, *“we have some misunderstandings when it comes to interpretation of the messages. It’s hard to get the tone, when you don’t see the person on the other side of the screen”* (Appendix E, Interview III). Five participants also mentioned misinterpretation of comments under social media posts, as expressed by Participant 5: *“once I misinterpreted a comment she left on a friend’s post, thinking it was flirtatious”* (Appendix E, Interview III). In addition, one participant mentioned a conflict that emerged from posting on social media; she explained that she told her partner that she is staying at home in the evening, but he saw on her social media profile that she went out with a friend. Nevertheless, she emphasised that *“these are small, silly situations”* (Appendix E, Interview XVIII). Another important finding is that eight participants emphasised that they solve misunderstandings emerging from social media usage over video call, phone call, or voice messages. A majority of them suggest that in this way they are able to read the emotions of their partner. As an example, Participant 24 stated,

“In such situations, we usually call each other on video or send a voice message to resolve this type of conflict” (Appendix E, Interview XV).

Participants were asked whether they believe that social media have the potential to harm LDRs. As many as 11 participants expressed that it is possible, while six participants held the opposite view, and 10 had mixed feelings on the matter. Among those who had concerns regarding social media platforms, four participants worried that its use could lead to trust issues, while another six interviewees shared a negative opinion regarding excessive usage of mentioned platforms. One participant said that both trust issues and overuse are problematic. Nevertheless, five participants defended social media within this context. Their main reasoning was that the variety of communication options offered by social media platforms outweighs the potential harm to their relationships, as expressed by Participant 15: *“I think they hurt relationships that aren't long-distance more. In long-distance relationships, social media has so many advantages that they generally help rather than hurt”* (Appendix E, Interview VIII). Moreover, one participant argued that it ultimately comes down to trust—according to his views, if partners trust each other, social media should not pose a threat to their relationship. A similar perspective was expressed by participants who had mixed feelings about social media’s ability to harm relationships, as many of them mentioned responsible social media usage and its connection to trust. Participant 25 shared these views and stated, *“I think social media itself isn't the problem; it's more about trust. If there's no trust, any small thing, even social media, can harm a relationship”* (Appendix E, Interview XVI). Considering other respondents whose opinion was neither positive nor negative, majority of them mentioned that the possibility to harm relationships depends on the user rather than the social media platforms themselves. For example, Participant 22 shared, *“I believe it's not so much about the apps themselves but mainly about the people who use them”* (Appendix E, Interview XIII).

In terms of establishing rules regarding social media usage, 19 participants reported that they have set certain rules with their partners. Six interviews with couples and two with individual participants revealed that they established specific rules regarding interactions with ex-partners, with Participant 17 stating, *“we allow each other to follow ex-partners, wish them a happy birthday, or respond to simple questions or innocent conversations, but we do not*

accept flirting” (Appendix E, Interview IX). Two individual participants and four couples agreed on the value of transparency. According to their rules, online interactions with others are allowed but must be transparent and directly communicated to their partner. For example, Participant 6 shared, *“We decided that the most important rule considers transparency and we discuss any discomforts openly”* (Appendix E, Interview III). Another two couples and one participant had set rules regarding public content sharing and personal data disclosure, aiming to control the number of details revealed on social media platforms about their private life or shared life. Participant 11 shared this view and explained, *“we try to avoid posting too much personal information about each other and make sure we’re both comfortable with what gets shared”* (Appendix E, Interview VI). In addition, two participants mentioned establishing rules aimed at limiting phone and social media usage, prioritizing shared time with their partners without technological distraction. For example, Participant 24 noted, *“Often, one of us would get annoyed due to a lack of attention, so we decided to limit such purposeless social media browsing”* (Appendix E, Interview XV).

5.7. GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The last section of the interviews aimed to generally assess what participants think about social media usage in relation to the quality of their LDRs. It highlights a generally positive outlook among participants regarding social media usage among LDRs. Key patterns reveal that social media are appreciated since they offer continuous and various communication. While some acknowledge potential negative effects, such as misunderstanding and jealousy, the overall findings demonstrate that social media enhance the quality of LDRs.

Twenty respondents indicated that Facebook and/or Instagram usage has a positive impact on the quality of their relationships. A majority of their responses were focused on the benefits of communication through social media channels. These advantages included constant connection, ease of communication, a variety of communication options, and the ability to feel engaged in their partner’s life through continuous following. For example, Participant 5 shared, *“Being able to see her posts and chat with her, make me feel more involved in her daily life”* (Appendix E, Interview III), and Participant 10 added *“now each platform has lots of features like video or voice recording”* (Appendix E, Interview V).

Several participants also expressed that using social media platforms helps them to cope with the distance, as noted by Participant 9, *“it gives us space to talk, and since we're not fans of the distance, we use social media a lot to maintain our relationship”* (Appendix E, Interview V), and Participant 21 shared, *“Maybe if we lived together in the same city, social media wouldn't be as significant, but in our case, it's definitely a major support for our relationship”* (Appendix E, Interview XII). Notably, none of the participants reported that Facebook or Instagram negatively impact the quality of their relationships. The remaining seven interviewees said that it depends, as they saw both advantages and disadvantages. The positives they mentioned were similar to those mentioned by participants who clearly stated that social media platforms have a beneficial influence on relationship satisfaction. However, the negatives identified by participants included misunderstandings, distraction, and jealousy. As an example, Participant 20 shared:

“Instagram or Facebook have a mixed impact on our relationship satisfaction. On one hand, they help us stay in touch and share our lives with each other, which is satisfying. However, they also come with the risk of causing misunderstandings or jealousy, which can negatively affect our satisfaction” (Appendix E, Interview XI).

A significant majority, all but two interviewees, clearly expressed that the absence of social media platforms would have a negative impact on the satisfaction of their relationships. The other two participants did not claim that it would have a positive effect, but their views were neutral, considering both the benefits and drawbacks. One of these individuals mentioned that partners might be more focused on each other if Facebook and Instagram did not exist, while the other respondent said that in the case of his relationship, social media definitely help to maintain their connection. However, he emphasized that *“there are probably couples who could focus more on each other rather than their ‘online persona.’ In such cases, I suspect that social media might have a negative impact, and it might be better without them”* (Appendix E, Interview IX).

Lastly, participants were asked whether they can think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with their partner and positively impact their relationship. Eleven participants refrained from answering due to a lack of ideas, with one adding that *“I think they already have so many features that it's hard to think of anything”* (Appendix E, Interview XVI). The remaining 15 participants offered a variety of suggestions. Two interviewees came up with the idea of a shared timeline feature,

where partners could browse memories and posted content, as suggested by Participant 6, “*I’d love a ‘couple’s timeline’ feature where we can jointly post memories, plan events, and track our milestones*” (Appendix E, Interview III). Another suggestion, proposed by two couples and one individual participant, was a ‘shared activities’ feature, allowing couples to engage in online activities together, such as watching movies or playing online games. Another participant suggested the option of a shared calendar, as Participant 20 explained, “*This could help us coordinate visits or plan activities more seamlessly, integrating with our social media interactions and making it easier to keep track of our plans together*” (Appendix E, Interview XI). Participant 21 proposed adjustment of notifications to the time zone, while Participant 14 focused attention on the privacy issues and suggested “*better privacy controls to feel more secure sharing personal moments*” (Appendix E, XII).

6. DISCUSSION

This research addressed the impact of Facebook and Instagram on the quality of LDRs, in particular analysing the communication habits of distant partners, the benefits and threats of social media usage, and the mechanism used by couples to cope with the geographical separation. All individuals who took part in the interviews were in long-distance romantic relationships and resided in different countries, and in some cases, even continents. This allows for a more precise definition of LDRs, as previous studies struggled to define the distance separating partners (Krapf, 2016). In addition, all participants expressed that they regularly arrange in-person meetings, which aligns with Pistole et al.'s (2010) definition of LDRs, which specified that individuals involved in this type of relationship periodically come together for reunions, before parting once again. Participants expressed that the main reasons why they live separately included work and education, which corresponds to Pistole et al.'s (2010) findings, and some of them also mentioned obligations towards friends and family, which was also highlighted by Kelmer et al. (2013). Regarding the way participants met their partners, one third indicated that they met online, either through dating applications or social media platforms. This is a particularly interesting finding, as it confirms the previous study of Kwok & Wescott (2020), who found that online interactions have become the third most popular method for initiating romantic relationships, “with more than one-third of all marriages resulting from connecting online” (Kwok & Wescott, 2020, p. 657). In terms of the struggles that participants encountered because of the distance, the vast majority of responses was focused on the issues with communication, feelings of longing, or a feeling of missing out. All those factors have been mentioned in previous literature, as Walęcka-Matyja & Dębska (2023) mentioned that there are vast differences between online and offline communication, while Sahlstein (2004) pointed out that affection may grow due to physical separation. In addition, several participants reported struggles related to their financial situation, mostly due to the cost of traveling, which to some extent contradicts the argument of Hertlein et al. (2013) that today's online communication allows people to form LDRs regardless of individuals' financial situation.

In terms of devices used for communication with partners, the vast majority of respondents reported using Facebook and/or Instagram applications on smartphones, while the remaining interviewees reported using both smartphones and laptops. This finding aligns with previous

literature, as Amez & Baert (2020) highlighted that smartphones play a crucial role in sustaining constant connection between individuals, while Marino et al. (2021) pointed out that smartphones provide the option to conveniently use social media applications.

In connection to social media platforms, all participants utilise Facebook and/or Instagram on a daily basis to communicate with their distant partner. The high frequency of communication through social media observed in this study even surpassed existing data, which suggested that 70% of Facebook users and nearly 60% of Instagram users reported using these platforms on a daily basis, with at least one visit per day (Pew Research Center, 2023). The results also revealed that distant partners make use of a variety of features offered by Facebook and Instagram, which include text messaging, video calls, voice messages, content sharing, and even phone calls (mentioned by just one person). The variety of functions utilized by individuals involved in LDRs aligns with previous research, which demonstrated that social media platforms are rich in communication options and they enable exchanging ideas and messages in different ways, allowing users to create a new form of language (Tupamahu et al., 2023). This also relates to the type of content shared by participants. Findings show that majority of participants reported sharing photos, videos, text messages, instant photos and videos, memes, and voice notes. Some of them also mentioned that they exchange links to interesting online articles on direct messages on Facebook and Instagram. An important insight is that many participants reported sharing content to maintain the flow of the conversation, showcase moments from their daily lives, or even send photos to show what they are doing at a given moment. Previous studies confirm this, as it was stated that Facebook and Instagram are commonly used by individuals to maintain close connections and users of these platforms exchange various forms of content to “facilitate or as part of conversation” (Sleeper et al., 2016, p. 105). In addition, Venema & Lobinger (2017) stated that sharing photographs on social media between partners holds significant importance in relationships because it helps partners to engage in real-time communication and creates a sense of shared visual space.

In addition, exchanging memes emerged as an important topic, as a vast majority of participants exchange memes with their partners daily. The main reasons for sharing memes included coping with the distance and providing an opportunity to share laughter in the

virtual world. In addition, many participants highlighted that they send targeted memes to their partner that they would not share with others. The findings connected to memes align with existing studies, as it was stated that sharing memes serves as a means of providing comfort (Tibbs, 2023), and romantic partners more and more often engage in exchanging such content (Brody & Cullen, 2023). Moreover, these actions may lead to the increase of relationship satisfaction, as previous literature suggested that the presence of humour forecasted higher levels of relationship contentment (Walker et al., 2024).

Previous literature suggests that communication that takes place through social media can evoke the feeling of a partner's co-presence, while the couple is separated by distance (Gooch & Watts, 2014). As many as 11 participants expressed a positive opinion about the ability of social media to bridge the gap between them, sharing that features such as video calls and photo sharing can create a sense of closeness. The importance of video calls was also noted in the past research, as Greenberg & Neustaedter (2013) revealed that couples in LDRs frequently use video chatting to enhance online co-presence, while Chan (2020) noted that vide calls encourage "a greater sense of connection between partners...[and]...simulates the direct presence of the partner" (p. 751). Nine participants also expressed that video calls are a key moment when they feel particularly close or connected to their partners, with some of them reporting falling asleep together during a video chat. In addition, Shen & Khalifa, (2009) identified *awareness*, namely the degree to which social actors are perceived by users, as one of the core elements of social presence theory, and the use of on indicators such as online/offline status change to increase awareness. This theory was reflected in the responses, as 14 participants felt that seeing their partner active on Facebook or Instagram positively influenced their sense of closeness and perceived presence. Nevertheless, three participants disagreed, highlighting that social media does not eliminate the feeling of distance, and the remaining interviewees had mixed feelings about the topic. The pattern that emerged among their responses clearly shows that, for them, social media can reduce the feeling of distance to some extent, but it does not fully replace physicality. This pattern is also reflected in the argument of Gooch & Watts (2014), who stated that not every type of personal relationship can be presumed to benefit from online communication in the same way.

Regarding cyberspace, Kolozsvari (2015) argued that distant partners share a specific kind of space, which can be seen as non-physical space that they construct together, and that for many individuals this shared space exists in cyberspace. Kolozsvari's perspective was reflected in this study, as 22 participants see cyberspace as a shared space in their relationship. A majority of responses were centered around the idea that a significant number of interactions between partners takes place in virtual world, therefore it is indeed the space that is shared by them. These findings also align with the argument of Gómez-Urrutia & Tello-Navarro (2021) who shared that new technologies blur the boundaries between online and offline communication, creating a hybrid network of relationships that reshape spatial borders.

In connection to planning real-life events, participants were asked whether they use Instagram and Facebook to get inspirations or plan such events. The vast majority of respondents reported that they used those platforms to find local events, restaurants and cafes, or travel ideas. Interestingly, Instagram was identified as the main source for inspiration, often due to its visual features. This finding is related to the existing literature, which emphasised that Instagram promotes offline meetings (Serafinelli, 2017) and users are likely to plan real-life events based on the attractive visual content seen on this platform (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022). In addition, 14 respondents felt more motivated to participate in real-life activities with their partner knowing that they could share their experiences online afterwards. This supports the previous studies, which suggested that partners might be more motivated to take part in offline activities in order to share it on Instagram afterwards and they are likely to plan their real-life events based on the attractive visual content seen on Instagram (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022).

The findings of this study also exposed how people involved in LDRs perceive the role of social media in emotional expression and its maintenance. More than half of the respondents believe that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram play an important role in bridging the emotional gap created by distance. These findings echo previous studies that found partners may feel emotionally connected through social media (Fox et al., 2013), as some actions that partners perform on social media make their partner feel loved (Shockley, 2017). Interestingly, several participants emphasised the importance of emojis for conveying

affection, and some participants mentioned their importance in emotional expression and sustaining intimacy. Existing literature showed that using emojis allows couples for “creating shared and secret uniqueness” (Kelly & Watts, 2015, p. 5), and emojis are commonly employed to express intimacy beyond simple words (Pateno et al., 2022). On the other hand, some participants expressed the limitations of social media compared to real-life interactions due to the lack of gestures and physicality that cannot be replaced by online interactions. This was clearly depicted when participants were asked whether they prefer to express emotions in an online or offline environment and only one couple shared that the online expression of emotions is more advantageous. More than half of the respondents stated that they prefer to express emotions face-to-face, as this type of interaction allows them to read the body language and to engage in affectionate physical gestures. Lieberman & Schroeder (2020) argued that online interactions are lacking non-verbal cues such as gestures, tone of voice or facial expressions, resulting in two significant implications, namely “it can reduce people’s understanding of others’ thoughts and feelings” (p. 17) and it “makes the communicator appear ... less thoughtful and emotional” (p. 17). Their perspective explains the responses of long-distance partners, as the lack of non-verbal cues seemed to be the main reason for choosing offline interactions, over online. The remaining 11 respondents showed a clear pattern, as they suggested that expressing positive emotions is better in an offline environment, while negative emotions, especially those connected to conflict situations, are easier to express in a virtual environment.

Sexting can be described as a sexual act based on the exchange of sexually attractive content such as photos or messages (Adell, 2023), which has the capability to enhance the stability and satisfaction among distant partners (Beckmeyer et al., 2021), to provide a substitute physical intimacy for distant partners (Ouytsel et al., 2020), and to be a strategy for relationship maintenance (Goldsmith & Byers, 2018). In terms of this study, 23 participants reported that they sext with their partners on Facebook and/or Instagram direct message. This number aligns with previous findings, which suggested that while nearly four out of 10 individuals in romantic relationships practice sexting with their partner (Lindner, 2023), distant partners are more prone to engage in sexting than those in close proximity (Beckmeyer et al., 2021). Sexting was seen by several participants as a way to fulfil the sexual needs that cannot be fulfilled in person due to distance, which corresponds to the idea

that sexting serves as a means to bridge the physical gap by maintaining emotions and sustaining intimacy (Beckmeyer et al., 2021).

More than half of the participants, 17 of them, reported sharing their romantic life online, especially through sharing photos of their partner or updating relationship status. These findings are supported by Fox et al. (2013), who mentioned that social media poses the power not only to communicate with a romantic partner, but also to communicate the love between partners to the world. Furthermore, a majority of participants, who indicated sharing their relationship online suggested that the main reason for that is indicating that they are 'taken', which may discourage potential individuals who might be interested in them and avoid conflict situations. This motivation relates to the previous literature on threats of social media usage, as Sharabi & Hopkins (2021) highlighted that social media can improve the general quality of relationships, as long as partners are able to "resist the temptation of alternatives" (p. 3538).

Regarding the advantages of social media use, as many as 21 participants reported planning face-to-face activities through several features, such as video calls, and the majority of participants listed activities such as date nights or watching movies, which supports the theory of Chae (2024). Another advantage of social media usage among couples was reflected in the possibility to create online shared networks with partners. Nearly all participants, with the exception of one, shared that they follow their partner's friends, and in some cases family members, on Facebook and/or Instagram. Gomillion et al. (2017) claimed that the integration of social networks into romantic relationship is crucial in order to create partners' shared social identity. Sharing friends correlates with higher levels of satisfaction, commitment and positive outlook regarding the future of their relationship. Several interviewees mentioned that creating online shared networks with their partner helps to be integrated into their partner's life, which aligns with the findings of Blair & Holmberg (2008), who stated that relationships are not isolated entities but are embedded within broader social constructs and social media fosters this sense through creation of shared networks. In addition, 25 participants stated that they feel more comfortable around their partner's close ones if they follow them on social media, highlighting that it helps to provide comfort in conversation and facilitates the feeling of familiarity. These findings are

consistent with the idea that social media feeds depicting partners together create the feeling of an icebreaker when it comes to face-to-face meetings, as people who have seen the person on a partner's profile can have the impression of closer connection than they would feel to a stranger (National University, 2024, para. 2). Moreover, the feeling of comfort among a partner's acquaintances is crucial since the early disapproval of a partner's friends can lead to serious consequences, such as termination of the relationship (Fiori et al., 2018).

The interviews also revealed the importance of instant messaging. A vast majority of participants reported that they perceive instant messaging as significant, as it allows them to stay constantly connected and engaged continuous conversations. This notion corresponds to the study of Hu (2004), who suggested that constant connection can be maintained through instant messaging. In addition, Hua (2016) argued that constant connection is an essential element of a successful relationship since it enables couples to be updated about their daily routine and creates the impression of nearly real-time conversations. The main advantages perceived by distant couples were focused on two main opportunities, namely constant communication and variety of communication. According to Dawot & Ibrahim (2014), communication that takes place on social media can be accomplished through various ways, as these platforms constantly introduce new elements into their frameworks. The integration of novel features aims to accomplish social networking objectives and goals, which include: "to generate online communities, to provide the creation of the interaction, to share user-created content among the members of online communities" (p. 178).

This study also explored the negative aspect and the threats coming from social media usage. The findings revealed that jealousy between long-distance couples can be seen as a serious threat to the quality of those relationships. Nineteen of 27 participants reported struggling with the feeling of jealousy due to their partner's Facebook and/or Instagram usage. Interactions with other users through liking photos, leaving comments, or moments when a partner saw their significant other tagged in photos were identified by several participants as those that trigger jealousy. In addition, other respondents mentioned exchanging messages through direct message function with other users and interactions with ex-partners as a cause of these negative feelings. Two participants added an interesting insight to existing studies, as they reported jealousy that stemmed from cultural differences among partners. The large number of participants who experienced jealousy has its connection to existing studies, as

previous report suggested that 23% of individuals engaged in romantic relationships experienced higher levels of jealousy and insecurity related to their partner's social media usage, especially because of interpersonal connections with other users (Pew Research Center, 2020).

In connection to the topic of jealousy, this study investigated whether long-distance couples accept the following of ex-partners on Facebook and/or Instagram. Thirty percent of distant partners reported that they do not engage in those behaviours, as avoiding interactions with ex-partners provides comfort for their current partner, avoids conflict situations and proves that their partners are not looking for alternatives. The existing literature suggests social media platforms enable users to connect with their ex-partners, and potentially new individuals that they might find attractive, which may lead to emotions such as “distrust, jealousy, and doubt in relationships that would have otherwise been unaffected” (Yacoub et al., 2018, p. 55). In line with this argument, Sharabi & Hopkins (2021) also emphasised that certain social media platforms, such as Instagram, may pose a threat because it contains appealing alternatives for individuals, including potential options for partners beyond their current relationship. The remaining participants indicated that they either follow people that they were emotionally involved with in the past, or they select certain people that they either agree or disagree to follow them, as there are only a few past connections they are uncomfortable with. This finding aligns with previously studies which reported that 70% of young adults acknowledge using social media to monitor people they were previously involved with romantically (Vogels & Anderson, 2020).

Existing studies noted the problem of distraction caused by technology, that can vastly influence the quality of romantic relationships (Roberts & David, 2016). A Pew Research Center (2020) report shows that approximately half of respondents who are engaged in romantic relationships indicate that their loved one is frequently or occasionally preoccupied with their cellphone during conversations. McDaniel & Coyne also argued that mentioned *technoferece* diminishes relationship satisfaction, especially when couples extensively rely on technological devices. The problem of technological distraction among distant partners was reflected in this study, as a substantial majority experienced their partner being distracted by smartphone or social media usage, what led to increased frustration or the feeling of being

ignored. Previous publications also emphasised the role of social media in causing such distractions (Koessmeier & Büttner, 2021; Arikewuyo et al., 2021).

The last reported disadvantage of social media usage concerned conflicts and misunderstandings caused by online communication. A majority of participants shared that they struggle to understand the tone of the messages, as they lack physical gestures and bodily expressions. This finding aligns with the argument of Lieberman & Schroeder (2020), who stated that unlike face-to-face encounters, online interactions are lacking nonverbal cues, which “can reduce people’s understanding of others’ thoughts and feelings” (p. 17). Another finding is that several participants highlighted that they solve misunderstandings emerging from social media usage over video calls, as in this way they are able to read the emotions of their partner. This result supports previous studies since it was discovered that video calls are characterised by multiple sensory aspects that contribute to maintaining feelings closeness (Watson et al., 2020).

This study is also in line with previous studies that found that couples tend to set boundaries while utilizing social media platforms (Norton & Baptist, 2014). In this study, 19 participants reported that they set certain rules with their partners regarding social media interactions. Those rules included interactions with ex-partners, transparency, public content sharing and personal data disclosure, and limited social media usage. Since interaction with ex-partners and the issue of excessive social media usage were already addressed in the context of jealousy and technological distraction, this section will focus on personal data sharing and transparency. The responses align with the research of Miguel (2016), who emphasised that individuals tend to be reluctant when it comes to sharing intimate details on social media platforms and they tolerate only certain levels of relationship disclosure, such as being tagged in photos published by their partner.

Overall, the interviews revealed a very positive attitude of distant partners towards social media usage. Twenty participants expressed that Facebook and/or Instagram usage has a positive impact on the quality of their relationships due to the benefits of constant connection, ease of communication and its variety. In addition, responses indicated that those platforms allow distant partners to be up-to-date with each other’s lives. In connection to

physical separation, several interviewees shared that social media usage can be compared to relational maintenance behaviours which help to cope with the distance. This finding aligns with several previous studies. Valenzuela et al. (2014) argued that social media platforms have the power to facilitate maintenance behaviours among romantic partners, while Kuske (2020) emphasised that social media platforms play a significant role in maintain LDRs and highlighted the “importance of consistent communication using various media forms for relational maintenance” (p. 12). More importantly, none of the participants expressed that Facebook or Instagram negatively impact the quality of their relationships, while some shared mixed feelings pointing out at both advantages and disadvantages of this medium of communication. To some extent this result contradicts with certain academic perspectives, as McDaniel & Coyne (2014) argued that technology leads to frequent interruptions in daily life of couples and online advancements, such as social media, may cause decreased level of relationship quality. To further elaborate on the topic, another finding suggests that the absence of social media would negatively impact the quality of LDRs, as 25 participants shared this opinion.

Lastly, interviews revealed further recommendations of features that could help to maintain long-distance romantic relationships, including a shared timeline feature, shared activities feature, shared calendar, adjustment of notifications to the time zone, and better privacy controls.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to discover the influence of social media platforms, in particular of Facebook and Instagram, on the quality of long-distance romantic relationships. It also sought to explore several dimensions of social media usage in connection to distant partners. The results revealed that partners in LDRs use Facebook and Instagram daily. For them, social media platforms serve as a vital communication channel and distant partners utilize various features, including not only text messages but also voice messages, video calls, content sharing, and even voice calls. A notable and somewhat surprising finding is the importance of memes, which help to replace face-to-face interactions and bring humour into the relationship. Another significant discovery is the extensive use of smartphones, as the majority of participants highlighted that they treat smartphones as their primary device for communication with partners.

In terms of social presence theory and whether social media facilitate the feeling of being next to one another, opinions were divided. For some, social media can indeed bridge the gap of distance and make partners' feel connected, while some individuals had the opposite opinion, as for them, social media interactions are incomparable to those in real life. In addition, the concept of cyberspace was examined, and the majority of participants reported that cyberspace represents a shared space in their relationship, which corresponds to the previous studies on long-distance partners, which suggest that virtual shared space helps individuals to cope with the distance (Kolozviri, 2015).

In addition, this research revealed the benefits and threats following Facebook and Instagram usage for individuals involved in LDRs. In connection to the benefits, this study demonstrated that the ability to maintain instant connection, and variety of communication positively impacts relational maintenance mechanisms, which are crucial for improving the quality of intimate relationships (Goldsmith & Byers, 2018; Merolla, 2012). Distant partners also confirmed that social media allow them to create online shared networks with their partners, which positively influences their relationships, making them feel more comfortable among their partner's acquaintances and keeping them up-to-date with partners live. Considering the negative aspects of Facebook and Instagram usage, this study exposed the presence of jealousy and technological distraction among partners, which can lead to

decreased relational satisfaction. In addition, it was found that communication based solely on text messages can lead to misinterpretations, resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the majority of the interviewed couples reported having their own ways to deal with such problems and achieving consensus with their partners.

As the main objective of this study was to analyse the direct impact of Facebook and Instagram on the quality of LDRs, it can be claimed that participants believe those platforms have a far more positive impact on the quality of their relationships. The interviews revealed that despite the issues and risks posed by social media, the benefits of these communication channels outweigh the negative aspects. According to several responses, if partners trust each other and use these platforms thoughtfully, they help to sustain and nurture LDRs, as they serve as an alternative to real-life interactions. This was particularly confirmed by the fact that when participants were asked about the impact Facebook and Instagram have on the quality of their relationship, not a single person reported a negative influence. The vast majority of responses demonstrated that these platforms help in maintaining their relationships, while others emphasised that as long as social media is used wisely, it boosts their relationship satisfaction. Lastly, nearly all participants highlighted that the absence of Facebook and Instagram in their lives would have a negative impact on the quality of their relationships, what suggest the value of these platforms for distant partners.

This research contributes to exploring the understudied area of long-distance romantic relationships, at the same time filling a gap in the literature. By emphasising how Facebook and Instagram impact the quality of these relationships, the research offers valuable insights that can contribute to the formation of future studies and developments in the field. In addition, the results of this study hold practical implications for the social media industry, offering ways to enhance social media applications specifically for romantic partners or those in LDR. Lastly, this study also makes a social contribution by promoting the well-being of couples living in different geographical locations. By highlighting the positive and negative aspects of social media usage, the study encourages couples to rethink how to use these platforms thoughtfully in order to gain benefits, rather than harm their relationship.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size, as only 18 interviews were conducted. In addition, the age range of the participants, restricted to 21-37, might have excluded perspectives from younger or older individuals involved in LDRs. Another limitation is the fact that some participants mentioned using other communication platforms than Facebook or Instagram, such as WhatsApp, suggesting that future research could potentially consider a broader analysis across various platforms. Furthermore, the disciplinary focus of this study can be seen as another limitation, as the study was primarily conducted from the perspective of communication studies. While this approach resulted in valuable insights, a psychological perspective could enhance the methods and the analysis of data as it would allow for behavioural observations during the interviews. This approach could offer a deeper understanding of the emotional and cognitive aspects.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Sampling procedure- copy of Facebook post.



Hi everyone!

I am a master's student working on my thesis. The focus of my research is on long-distance relationships, specifically how partners use social media (Facebook and Instagram) to maintain their connection despite the distance.

I am looking for individuals who are currently in a long-distance relationship and would be willing to share their experiences in a short interview conducted via Zoom. Your stories and insights are incredibly valuable and will contribute to a better understanding of how couples use social media to stay close.

If you have a moment and would like to help, please leave a comment below or send me a private message. I would greatly appreciate your assistance and time!

Thank you very much for any response, and warm regards,
Aleksandra

Lubię to! Skomentuj Wyślij Udostępnij

APPENDIX B: Sampling procedure- copy of Instagram story.

LONG DISTANCE COUPLES!

I'm looking for participants for interviews for my master's thesis! If you're interested or know someone who might be, I'd appreciate you sharing this post or recommending someone in a long-distance relationship. 🙏

DM me for more details!

Thank you! ✨

APPENDIX C: Complete list of interview questions.

1. How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?
2. What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?
3. How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?
4. Have you met online or face-to-face?
5. Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?
6. What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?

7. Do you communicate with your partner through social media, and how often if it applies to you?
7. How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (e.g., instant messaging, video calls)?
8. What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?
9. Do you exchange humorous content such as memes with your partner, and what does it mean for your relationship?
10. Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, and type of interactions.
11. What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (e.g., laptop, smartphone)
12. Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or Instagram influence your sense of closeness?
13. Do you think that social media can bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?
14. Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?
15. Do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace as a shared space for you and your partner?
16. Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events such as visiting places or restaurants based on attractive content seen on Facebook or Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?
17. Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner knowing that you can share them on Facebook and/or Instagram afterward?
18. Do you think that the features of Instagram or Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?
19. Do you think that Instagram or Facebook helps you maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?
20. Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?

21. Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in an online or offline environment? Why?
22. Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?
23. Have you ever used Instagram or Facebook to engage in joint activities with your partner, such as online dates or watching movies together?
24. Do you think that Facebook or Instagram enables you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?
25. Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?
26. What are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?
27. Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?
28. Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?
29. Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook or Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?
30. Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?
31. Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel?
32. Have you ever felt that Instagram or Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?
33. Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?
34. How do you think Instagram or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?
35. Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?
36. Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?

APPENDIX D: Informed consent

Title of the study: The influence of social media on long-distance romantic relationships.

Institution: Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Researcher: Aleksandra Laska

Contact details: laskaaleksandra@gmail.com

Purpose of the research: You are invited to participate in research about the impact of social media on the quality of long-distance relationships. The main purpose is to understand what is the role of social media in communication, connection, and relationship satisfaction among couples who live in different countries.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will take part in an interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted via Zoom, and with your permission it will be audio-recorded for analysis purposes.

Confidentiality: Participation in this research is completely anonymous. All personal information about you will be removed, and each participant will be identified only by label such as “Participant [number]”. The data collected will be securely stored and used only for academic purposes.

Voluntary participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences or explanation. If you choose to do so, all data collected from you will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the study.

Consent to Participate: By signing below, you agree to participate in the study and you indicate that you have understood the information provided.

Participant name:

Participant signature:

Researcher signature:

Date:

APPENDIX E: Interview transcripts

1. Interview I: Participant 1 and Participant 2 (Couple 1)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 1: We have been in a relationship for 1.5 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 1: It is between Poland and Australia. It's challenging but we try to manage. Participant 2: Yes, it's tough but we make it work through constant communication.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 1: Up until now we managed to see each other every 6 months, so it is around twice a year, but when we do see each other, we spend 1.5-2 months together, so in total we managed to spend about 3-4 months a year together. Participant 2: We try to plan our visits around holidays so for ex. when I have school holiday, and my boyfriend works as a freelancer, so he saves money during most of the months to be able to take a longer break and come to Europe.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 1: We met online, on Tinder, while I was traveling around Europe. Participant 2: After that we managed to meet in person in Poland, and continued conversations online.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 1: Our physical separation is due to my work commitments in Australia and her studies in Poland. Participant 2: Yes, he works in Australia and I am completing my MA studies in Poland.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 1: The biggest struggle is not being able to physically comfort each other during tough times and of course the time difference. Participant 2: I agree, not being able to hug each other when we need it the most is really hard. When it comes to time difference, it's a big struggle.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Participant 1: Yes, we communicate daily through Instagram and Facebook. Participant 2: Every day, multiple times a day.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	Participant 1: We use instant messaging and video calls on both platforms. Participant 2: Yes, especially video calls and sending pictures and videos.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	Participant 1: We share pictures of our daily lives and things we find interesting. Participant 2: Yes, we also share memes and interesting posts.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Participant 1: Yes, we send each other memes everyday. Participant 2: Definitely, it's a way to share laughs despite the distance.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	Participant 1: We start our day with good morning messages and stay connected throughout the day with texts and video calls. Participant 2: Yes, we also end the day with good night messages.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Participant 1: We mainly use our smartphones. Participant 2: Yes, both of us rely on our smartphones for communication.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE	
Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Participant 1: Yes, seeing her active online makes me feel closer to her. Participant 2: Absolutely, it's a reminder that we're always connected.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and	Participant 1: Yes, social media help bridge the distance and make us feel closer. Participant 2: I agree, it's not the same as being together, but it helps a lot.

<p>create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 2: Yes, when he shared a post with incredibly emotional description about our relationship on our anniversary. Participant 1: For me it happened when she sent me a video of a surprise she planned for my visit. It made me feel very connected.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Cyberspace definitely serves as a shared space for us. It’s our way of being together despite the distance. Participant 2: Yes, it’s our virtual home where we share our lives and stay connected.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, we’ve planned many visits to places we saw on Instagram. One time, we went to a music festival I found through a post that my friend shared Participant 2: Yes, we also planned a trip to a national park after seeing it on Facebook.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, knowing that we can share our moments later motivates us to do more activities together. Participant 2: Definitely, it’s a way to create and share memories even when we are apart.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, we use features like video calls and messages to express our feelings.</p>
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to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	Participant 2: I agree, sending pictures and videos also helps convey emotions.
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	Participant 2: Yes, they help maintain a certain level of intimacy, but it's not the same as being together physically. Participant 1: I agree, they help to an extent, but nothing compares to face-to-face interaction.
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	Participant 1: I share occasionally, such as the post about our anniversary, but I prefer to keep most moments private. Participant 2: I am the opposite. I share a lot about us to show our happiness and also to let others know I'm in a committed relationship.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	Participant 1: It's easier to express positive emotions face-to-face. Participant 2: I agree, but for resolving conflicts, online communication gives us time to think before responding.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	Participant 2: Yes, it builds anticipation and excitement for when we finally meet. Participant 1: Yes, we engage in sexting occasionally. It helps fulfil some of our needs. We share both, messages and photos.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Sometimes, distant partners engage in joint activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	Participant 1: Yes, we often have 'online dates' via video chat on Instagram Direct. Although the time difference is sometimes a problem, we literally are not able to share proper dinner online because whenever I wake up, it's still evening for my girlfriend. Participant 2: Yes, it is a big struggle but we still try to do that! Sometimes we have dinner-breakfast dates together. We also stay connected on video chat while doing other activities like going for walks, doing groceries.
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<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, definitely. Instagram and Facebook help us connect with each other's friends and family. Living so far apart, it's great to have a shared network where we can both feel included and updated on each other's social circles.</p> <p>Participant 2: Yes, it's really useful to see and interact with each other's networks, even if we're far apart.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 2: Absolutely. It makes me feel like I'm part of their world and helps build a stronger connection.</p> <p>Participant 1: Yes, I feel like I know more about them and can connect better when we visit or chat.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 2: It allows us to share daily moments and keep up with each other's lives, which is crucial for maintaining closeness. The time difference means we can't always talk in real-time, but seeing each other's updates helps us stay connected.</p> <p>Participant 1: It is also important for sharing daily moments and keep up with each other's lives, which is crucial for maintaining closeness.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, it's vital for staying in touch and having quick conversations throughout the day.</p> <p>Participant 2: Definitely, it helps us stay connected and communicate efficiently.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Occasionally, but we talk through it and understand each other's boundaries. The distance and time difference can sometimes make it harder, but communication is key. Of course, we live completely two different lives and sometimes we experience jealousy, even when I see a photo of my girlfriend with another guy, but at the end of the day- it is all about trust.</p>
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	<p>Participant 2: I agree, it happens sometimes but we communicate openly about any issues.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p> <p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Participant 2: No, we both agree that following exes can cause unnecessary complications. Given our situation, it's crucial to avoid anything that might cause mistrust.</p> <p>Participant 1: Exactly, we both try to avoid following exes to keep things clear.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Participant 1: We've agreed to avoid sharing too much personal information and to be transparent about who we interact with. As we said before, we also agreed on not following people with whom we were emotionally involved in past.</p> <p>Participant 2: Yes, we have rules about not overusing social media and keeping our interactions respectful.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Sometimes, but we discuss it and make sure to set aside quality time together.</p> <p>Participant 2: Occasionally, it can be frustrating, but we try to balance our online time with real-life interactions. The distance between Australia and Poland makes our quality time, when we meet each other, even more precious, so we try to minimize distractions.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 2: A few times, but we talk it through and clear up any issues right away. It's sometimes hard to interpret tone and emotions through text, which can cause conflicts.</p> <p>Participant 1: That's true. It's challenging to gauge the other person's tone and intentions over messages, but we try to do our best and address any misunderstandings as soon as possible.</p>

<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 1: Yes, if not managed well, it can lead to misunderstandings or feelings of insecurity, but it does not really apply to our relationship. Participant 2: I agree, it can. Especially if one partner feels left out or neglected due to excessive online activity.</p>
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<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Participant 2: They help maintain our bond and make us feel closer despite the distance, so definitely it affects the quality of our relationship, especially the quality of communication. Participant 1: I also think that social media enhance our relationship satisfaction by keeping us connected and involved in each other's lives.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 1: It would negatively impact our relationship because we rely on it for regular communication and sharing. The time difference already makes things challenging, and without social media, it would be even harder. Participant 2: I totally agree.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 1: A feature that allows for better shared experiences or activities in real-time would be great. Something like a shared live streaming feature that adjusts for time zones. Participant 2: Yes, that's a good one, but I don't have any other ideas.</p>

2. Interview II: Participant 3 and Participant 4 (Couple 2)

<p>SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS</p>	
<p>How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 3: We've been together for almost two years now.</p>

	Participant 4: Yes, two years this September.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 3: The distance is between Chicago and Quito. Participant 4: It's challenging, especially with the flight costs, but we stay connected through social media and calls.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 4: We try to see each other at least 4 times a year, usually during holidays. Participant 3: Yes, it's usually for significant occasions or extended holidays to make the most out of our time together. Participant 4: Although planning takes a lot of coordination with work and finances.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 3: We met face-to-face during a conference in Chicago. Participant 4: Yes, I went there for few days for business conference and decided to extend my stay for a week after we have met.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 4: We both have professional and personal responsibilities that keep us in our cities for now. Participant 3: Yes, my job in Chicago and her commitments in Ecuador make it hard to relocate at the moment.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 4: I think that communication is quite challenging. Participant 3: I agree, it is not about misunderstandings, but mostly about managing time to communicate in a proper way and devoting enough time for my partner.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Participant 3: We communicate daily through Facebook and WhatsApp. Participant 4: Yes, we use Facebook for everything from chatting to video calls and WhatsApp for calls.
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<p>How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?</p>	<p>Participant 3: We use Facebook Messenger for text and voice messages, and Facebook video calls for face-to-face chats. Participant 4: Sometimes we also share photos and videos on Instagram, and us direct messages for quick updates.</p>
<p>What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?</p>	<p>Participant 4: We share our daily activities, special moments, and funny memes. Participant 3: Yes, we also share some political articles on Facebook, especially when it comes to election etc. We also share photos from our day-to-day lives.</p>
<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Definitely, sharing memes keeps things light and helps us laugh together despite the distance. Participant 4: Yes, it's a fun way to stay close and maintain a sense of humour.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Participant 3: We start the day with good morning messages, send photos or updates during lunch breaks, and have a video call in the evening. Participant 4: Throughout the day, we also share memes and voice messages.</p>
<p>What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)</p>	<p>Participant 4: Mostly my smartphone for its convenience. Participant 3: Same here, though I use my laptop for longer video calls.</p>

<p>SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE</p>	
<p>Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Yes, seeing her posts and updates makes me feel more connected to her daily life. Participant 4: Absolutely!</p>
<p>Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>Participant 4: To some extent, yes. It's not the same as being physically together, but it helps. Participant 3: Yes, it creates a sense of closeness that makes the distance more bearable.</p>

<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 4: For me, it happens when we exchange voice messages during a day. It feels like we can listen to our voices, complain together, express excitement.</p> <p>Participant 3: For me these are all of the tiny things that are important, such as when she posted a video of her birthday celebration and mentioned how much she missed me, or when she sends me photos with symbolical meaning to our relationship.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Cyberspace definitely serves as our shared space. In general, it is where we can communicate and share moments, so surely it feels like shared space.</p> <p>Participant 4: Yes, it's like our virtual home where we can meet and share experiences despite the physical distance.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Participant 4: Yes! Very often. I would say that most of the time when we see each other in Chicago, we check restaurants on Instagram, it is always nice to check some photos before choosing a place to eat. When it comes to visits in Ecuador, we often check the Facebook pages of National Parks or nice travel areas.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, it is always very usefull to check places first on social media. We can also just directly enter the link to book a table, or check the opening hours of certain places.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Definitely, sharing our moments online makes them more special and allows us to save those memories. Participant 4: Yes, it's a way to document our journey and show our friends and family how we enjoy our time together.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 4: Absolutely, the reactions and comments add another layer of emotional connection. Not even to mention the communication features, such as video calls or instant photos.</p> <p>Participant 3: Agree!</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Yes, by allowing us to share our lives and interact daily, they help maintain our emotional bond.</p> <p>Participant 4: Yes, the constant communication and sharing make us feel closer and emotionally connected.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 4: Yes, in my case it's a way to show our commitment and share our relationship with others.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, I also think that we share our relationship status and photos to keep our friends and family updated.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 3: I think it's easier offline because you can express emotions through touch and presence.</p> <p>Participant 4: I agree, but online we can still communicate deeply through thoughtful messages and calls. I would say that it mostly depends on situation.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 4: Yes, it helps keep the physical aspect of our relationship alive and adds a bit to our intimacy.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, it helps us to maintain the romantic spark between us.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used</p>	<p>Participant 4: Yes, we frequently use Facebook video chat to cook together or just hang out.</p>
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Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	
Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	<p>Participant 3: Absolutely, Facebook has allowed me to meet many of her friends and family. We often like or comment on each other's posts. Sometimes also chat.</p> <p>Participant 4: Yes, we are also being invited to some events organised by our friends. Also on Instagram we follow each other's friends.</p>
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?	<p>Participant 4: Definitely, regular interactions on Facebook make me feel more integrated into his social circle.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, same here. Social media makes me feel closer to her family and friends, which gives me more comfort during live conversations</p>
In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	<p>Participant 3: The ability to communicate daily, share everyday moments through photos and videos.</p> <p>Participant 4: For me the most important is instant contact, the ability to see each other in real-time, and keeping up with each other's lives through posts and stories.</p>
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	<p>Participant 4: Definitely, without it, it would be hard to maintain a close connection. WhatsApp and Messenger are our everyday tools.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, it's a crucial part of our communication. It allows us to exchange thoughts and feelings instantly, with no need to wait long for the answer.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	<p>Participant 4: Yes, sometimes I feel jealous when I see him commenting on other women's photos, but I try to understand and discuss it. At the end, it is nothing serious, so it doesn't affect our relationship.</p> <p>Participant 3: Same for me.</p>
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<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p> <p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Yes, I follow a few of my ex-partners. I know it sometimes makes her uncomfortable, but we are just friends.</p> <p>Participant 4: We've talked about it, and at the beginning I felt a bit insecure knowing he also keeps in touch with his exes. Now, I do not care that much, I trust him.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Participant 4: Yes, we've agreed not to overdo interactions with ex-partners and to be open to discussions if something bothers us.</p> <p>Participant 3: We agree to be honest about our online interactions. I would say that that is our fundamental rule.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Yes, sometimes I feel she is not fully present during our conversations, which can be frustrating.</p> <p>Participant 4: Same here! There are times when he is engaged with social media during our talks, and it makes me feel ignored.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 4: I agree, sometimes the lack of context or tone in text causes conflicts that we need to resolve later.</p> <p>Participant 3: Yes, it is about the lack of ability to read facial expressions or tone of voice, however we quickly resolve this problems via video or phone call.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 3: Definitely, without clear boundaries and openness, social media can cause tension and lack of trust.</p> <p>Participant 4: I agree.</p>

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	Participant 3: I believe they have a positive impact overall, allowing us to stay in frequent contact and share daily life. Participant 4: Yes, they are essential communication tools for us.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	Participant 4: I think it would have a negative impact since it would be harder to maintain regular contact. Participant 3: I agree, without social media, it would be difficult to maintain regular communication.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Participant 4: Maybe more advanced live movie-watching options that allow better interaction. Participant 3: Or, something like ‘a tab’ for couples or close friends, where we could have more online activities, or suggestions to virtually spend time together, maybe some games.

3. Interview III: Participant 5 and Participant 6 (Couple 3)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 5: We've been together for 1.5 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 6: It is between Poland and England. I'm not sure how many kilometres. Participant 5: The distance makes things tricky, but we make it work with lots of calls and visits.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 5: We see each other about once a month, either in the UK, Poland, or other travel destinations.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 6: We met face-to-face at a music festival.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 6: Mainly our jobs. Participant 5: Yes, mainly jobs, but also family and friends. It is hard to decide to move to another country, leaving everything behind.

<p>What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?</p>	<p>Participant 5: I think that the lack of physical presence and missing out on daily life together. Participant 6: That's true, I just miss him a lot and I wish we could spend more days together.</p>
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<p>SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE</p>	
<p>Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Yes, we use Instagram daily for chatting, video calls, and sharing updates. Occasionally, we use WhatsApp for long voice calls, for example when we buy the flight tickets, or exchange some more private data. It happens that we call each other over Instagram for quick chats. Participant 6: Yes, agree. We talk every day on Instagram and WhatsApp.</p>
<p>How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?</p>	<p>Participant 6: We use Instagram for almost everything – direct messages, video chats, sharing stories.</p>
<p>What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Photos, memes, voice notes, and daily updates through stories.</p>
<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Yes, we love sending each other memes. Participant 6: Absolutely, sharing memes keeps us laughing and connected. Sometimes I send specific memes only to my boyfriend because I have quite a dark sense of humour, and I know he won't take it seriously like others might.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Participant 6: I think that every day is a bit different, depending on our plans, but we always send a message in the morning and we try to call each other on video chat at least few times a day.</p>

<p>What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)</p>	<p>Participant 5: Smartphone. Participant 6: Yes, for me the same.</p>
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<p>SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE</p>	
<p>Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?</p>	<p>Participant 5: I don't think so. Participant 6: Not at all.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Yes, it really helps to bridge the gap, especially with video calls and frequent messages. Participant 6: I totally agree. For me video calls are the most important to create this feeling.</p>
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Nothing in particular, just all of the tiny interactions together. Participant 6: For me it happened, when he posted Reels from our romantic trip with our favourite song in the background. I could go back with memories to this time.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 5: I am not sure about it, but I think that it doesn't serve as our shared space. I mean, for me the only space that I share with him is rather physical. So I am kind of aware of the fact that we communicate online a lot, but I wouldn't call it shared space. Participant 6: Yes, that's true.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social</p>	<p>Participant 6: We've planned several dates based on Instagram posts, like restaurants, cafes, brunch places. We like certain vibe of the places we visit, so quite often we judge them based on their Instagram profile. Participant 5: I agree, we also check music festivals and weekend events on Instagram. It is always nice to know what's going on around the city.</p>

media influenced your face-to-face plans?	
Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?	<p>Participant 6: Yes, it's fun to share our adventures with friends online.</p> <p>Participant 5: Yeah, I think that sharing experiences makes them even more enjoyable.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY	
Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	<p>Participant 6: Yes, surely, we are constantly connected via social media so we keep expressing emotions through messages, emojis, sharing photos, and posting about our relationship.</p>
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	<p>Participant 6: I guess so. Even small gestures, such as sending heart emoji, matters when you are in a long-distance relationship.</p> <p>Participant 5: I agree, it is very important to pay attention to details and even the smallest gestures. Social media has a lot of such possibilities, from sending simple messages, to emoji, GIFs or photos that disappear after a second. All this is crucial to maintain emotional intimacy</p>
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	<p>Participant 5: We do, it's a way to publicly show our love.</p> <p>Participant 6: In addition, in the past each of us travelled a lot and had many partners, not even serious ones but I would call them 'situationships'. At the moment we are in a relationship and I like to show others that I am taken, I also like to know that my partner is fine with communicating to public that we are together. I believe that it limits conflict situations within our relationship.</p>

<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 6: Online can be easier because we have more time to think before we reply.</p> <p>Participant 5: I agree, online interactions always give us time to cool down in conflict situations. I can read a message a few times before sending it and decide if I really want to send it or if I want to add or change something.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 6: It happens from time to time! We send spicy messages and photos from time to time. It's important to keep the spark alive!</p> <p>Participant 5: True, it is something that we like and it is also nice to visualise the person that you are in a relationship with!</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in joint activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 6: Yes, we've had video call dinners and watched movies together online.</p> <p>Participant 5: Movies or having meals over video calls. That's right.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Yeah, Instagram has helped us build a shared network of friends.</p> <p>Participant 6: Totally, I keep interacting on Instagram with my boyfriend's friends, and the other way around.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 6: Definitely, it makes interacting with his friends and easier. I think that because of social media, I felt from the beginning very much included in his social network.</p> <p>Participant 5: Exactly!</p>

In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	Participant 5: I would say continuous communication and ability to connect with each other's social circles. Participant 6: Yes, it just helps us to stay up-to-date with our lives.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Participant 5: Yes. Participant 6: Agree.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Participant 5: Occasionally, especially if she's engaging with other guys' posts. Participant 6: Same for me, like when he comments on other girls' pictures. There was a time he commented on a colleague's photo, and I felt a bit jealous. We discussed it, and he assured me it was purely friendly.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Participant 5: We both follow some exes, but it's mostly for maintaining friendly connections. I did feel uncomfortable once when she liked a post by her ex about a significant life event, but we talked it out and I understood her perspective. Participant 6: Yes, we do, but it's not an issue as we trust each other.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	Participant 6: We decided that the most important rule considers transparency and we discuss any discomforts openly. For example, we decided not to delete messages or hide conversations from each other. Participant 5: We've set some boundaries, like being honest about who we're interacting with and not engaging in private conversations with exes. It's about mutual respect and trust.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or	Participant 6: One time during our date night on video call, he was constantly checking his phone for notifications.

<p>social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Participant 5: I remember only one situation. There was a time when we were on a video call, and she kept checking her Instagram feed. I felt ignored, so I brought it up, and she understood and made an effort to be more present.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 5: Yes, once I misinterpreted a comment she left on a friend's post, thinking it was flirtatious. It led to an argument, but we cleared it up after conversation. Participant 6: Surely, we have some misunderstandings when it comes to interpretation of the messages. It's hard to get the tone, when you don't see the person on the other side of the screen.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 6: Absolutely. It can lead to trust issues and unnecessary stress if boundaries aren't respected. Participant 5: Yes, if not managed properly. Over-reliance on social media or excessive interaction with others can create trust issues.</p>

<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Participant 6: Yes, I think that there is a positive impact. In a way I feel his presence, even though he is physically not here. Participant 5: I think that Instagram has a positive impact on our relationship satisfaction. Being able to see her posts and chat with her, make me feel more involved in her daily life.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 5: It would negatively influence our relationship. Without social media, we would miss out on sharing spontaneous moments and staying involved in each other's lives. Participant 6: Yes, I agree, I think that without it, we would feel more disconnected.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently</p>	<p>Participant 6: I'd love a "couple's timeline" feature where we can jointly</p>

missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	post memories, plan events, and track our milestones. Participant 5: That's great idea!
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4. Interview IV: Participant 7 and Participant 8 (Couple 4)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 7: 3 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 8: The distance is around 200 kilometres. It's challenging, but we make it work. Participant 7: The distance doesn't seem to be that great, but no matter how you look at it, these are two different countries - the Netherlands and Belgium.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 7: We usually visit each other around twice a month. Participant 8: Yes, we travel by train and we typically visit each other on weekends.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 7: We met online, on Tinder.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 8: It's work on both sides; we have stable jobs in Belgium and the Netherlands, and for now, we don't want to give them up.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 7: For me, it's definitely longing. I miss my partner a lot when we're not together. Participant 8: I agree with this; for me, it's both the longing and the financial issues. Traveling from one country to another twice a month puts quite a strain on our bank accounts, especially with the current ticket prices. Particiapnt 7: Totally agree.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Yes, we use platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, or Instagram almost daily. Participant 7: That's right; we're not big fans of TikTok, but we use WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook daily.</p>
<p>How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?</p>	<p>Participant 7: I think it depends on the platform. On Instagram, we sometimes use chat and send text messages, but we mainly use it to react to content and send pictures. Participant 8: Yes, and we use Facebook more for direct communication, such as text messages or video calls.</p>
<p>What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Generally, it's everything, from different accounts we like, to photos, short videos, sharing Reels with each other, or sending posts that interest us. Participant 8: Additionally, of course, a lot of text messages.</p>
<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Yes, we send each other a lot of memes. Participant 8: I think it has a pretty positive effect on our relationship; we don't have that many opportunities to laugh together in person, so at least we send each other memes to fill that need for humour.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Participant 8: Usually, during our morning routine, like making coffee, having breakfast, or getting dressed, we try to video call each other. It doesn't last long because we both start work at 9, so there isn't much time, but it's always a nice way to start the day. Participant 7: Exactly, and later, during work, we don't talk much; we have fairly strict rules at work, so we might exchange a message or photo during a break. After returning from work, we continue the conversation and try to video call again, as long as neither of us has plans and stays home.</p>

<p>What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)</p>	<p>Participant 8: We use iPhones. We have social media apps installed on them, and generally we don't use social media on our laptops.</p>
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<p>SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE</p>	
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<p>Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?</p>	<p>Participant 8: I guess I've never really noticed it. Participant 7: Me neither. I never check if my partner is online or not; I just send a message and know she'll reply soon anyway.</p>
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<p>Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Definitely. It's not the same as lying in the same bed and cuddling, but we send each other so many messages, videos, and photos that sometimes it feels like my boyfriend is right next to me. Participant 7: I feel the same way; it doesn't completely erase the feeling of distance, but it definitely helps. The option of video chat alone helps a lot. We can see each other's faces and hear each other's voices, and that feeling of being together appears.</p>
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<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 7: For me, it's probably every video call. Participant 8: Same for me; it's definitely more important than receiving a text message or posting a picture together.</p>
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<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Cyberspace is an interesting concept for me, but I think there is some truth to it. Currently, our relationship, because of the distance, is largely based on online interactions. We express our feelings there, share what we do every day, so I agree, cyberspace is our shared space. Participant 8: I agree too; when couples share a house or apartment, they come home from work and talk about what happened. After I finish</p>
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	work, I have similar conversations online, so I think cyberspace is largely our shared space.
Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?	<p>Participant 8: Yes, very often. We are "foodies." We love culinary travels, trying new restaurants or wineries. We usually get inspired by such content on Instagram.</p> <p>Participant 7: That's right! Maybe I have a mistaken belief, but I feel like every cool place or business these days has an Instagram profile, and we can also visually see what to expect from such profiles.</p>
Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?	<p>Participant 7: No, definitely not.</p> <p>Participant 8: I've never thought about it either, so I guess the answer is no.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	<p>Participant 7: I think so, but the question is whether such an expression of emotion is enough. Of course, I send a lot of affectionate messages, and I also send heart or hug emojis, but it's not the same as expressing emotions in real life.</p> <p>Participant 8: I think it can be; after all, we spend about a week together every month, and emotionally our relationship is on a good path, so it means we express a lot of emotions online. For me, even the shortest but most affectionate messages count.</p> <p>Participant 7: True, that could be the case. However, I think expressing emotions is easiest during video calls, where we can see and hear each other, so it's the closest to a face-to-face relationship.</p>
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<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, all the affectionate messages or video calls, etc., help maintain that intimacy.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 7: We post a lot of photos together, from travel pictures to anniversaries or birthdays we celebrate together.</p> <p>Participant 8: Exactly, and regarding the main reason, I think there are two for me. One is simply sharing our life with others, and our relationship is a huge part of our life. The second reason is to show others that I have a partner. I think this way, many potentially interested people will realize that I'm not single and not looking for other relationships.</p> <p>Participant 7: I agree; it's nice to show potential singles that we are in a happy relationship, and we probably avoid many unwanted situations this way.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 7: For me, it's offline. I prefer expressing emotions in person. I have to admit that I have a hard time expressing them in messages on a daily basis. Of course, I still do it, but it's definitely more effort for me.</p> <p>Participant 8: Same for me; I express emotions online, but it's definitely easier offline.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 8: To be honest- not much anymore. We used to do it often in the first year of our relationship, maybe even for the first 1.5 years, but now it happens very rarely.</p> <p>Participant 7: Exactly, especially since we see each other twice a month, so we don't have that big of a sexual gap. I think we would sext more often if we didn't have the opportunity to visit each other so frequently.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Quite often, we organize online dates, usually on Facebook video chat. We typically start by cooking together on both sides of the camera and then enjoy dinner and wine together. Participant 8: Sometimes, when there are major sporting events, like tennis or football finals, we also connect on a video chat and cheer and comment together.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Yes, at this point, we have a lot of mutual friends, and whenever we meet new people, we add them. Participant 8: I agree, but I have to admit that we mostly add them on Instagram; we use Facebook Messenger, but we don't care much about our profiles and usually communicate with friends through Instagram.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Absolutely, I try to keep in touch with my boyfriend's friends, even though they live in another country. I often like their photos, leave a comment, wish them a happy birthday, or congratulate them for another reason. Then, I feel much more comfortable face-to-face with them because we already have some background in online conversations. Participant 7: It's definitely the same for me. I think mutual friends, especially those who support our relationship, are very important. Instagram helps us communicate with them daily or even plan surprises for each other. When I see them in person, I feel like I haven't missed much.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 7: I don't really know what re the main ones. Participant 8: For me it's the possibility of constant communication.</p>

<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 8: I don't really have an opinion. Participant 7: For me, I think it's important. Instant messaging gives me the feeling that my partner is on the other side, and we can have an ongoing conversation.</p>
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<p>SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE</p>	
<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Yes, at one point, my boyfriend exchanged many messages with a friend from the past, with whom he had a deeper connection. Even though the messages were innocent and more about life updates, I was jealous. Participant 7: That's true, but we talked it over, and I showed her the messages. She saw that I was telling this friend how in love I was and how happy I was in my current relationship, and it actually made her happy to see that I was openly discussing our relationship, even with someone from my past.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Yes, we follow many past partners on Instagram, but aside from the previously mentioned situation, we've never had a problem with it and don't feel uncomfortable. Participant 7: Exactly, each of us has had some history, but we trust each other enough that it isn't a barrier in our relationship.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Not really, of course, we aren't happy if one of us shows too much interest in someone of the opposite sex, like having lots of conversations or liking their photos, but we don't have any specific rules.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or</p>	<p>Participant 8: Yes, it has happened to us on both sides. We both have very extensive networks of friends, and sometimes when we see each other in</p>

<p>social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>person, one of us gets annoyed that the other is spending too much time on their phone replying to other people instead of enjoying our time together. Participant 7: Exactly, usually one of us feels ignored because of this.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 7: I don't think we've had situations like that, maybe that one mentioned earlier, but definitely not on a daily basis.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 7: On the contrary, social media definitely doesn't hurt our relationship; it gives us a great opportunity to stay up-to-date with each other's lives and strengthens our bond.</p>

<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Participant 7: Yes, I think social media improves the quality of our relationship. It allows us to stay in touch at almost any moment of our lives, even when we are in different countries. Participant 8: I agree 100%.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 8: Of course, negatively! I can't imagine our relationship without social media. Participant 7: Me neither, especially considering that there aren't many alternatives to social media, certainly none that would offer us such a variety of communication options and ways to share our relationship with friends and loved ones.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 8: I think a nice option would be the ability to create couple profiles where they can manage the account together. Participant 7: Interesting idea, but I'm not sure if I like it. I don't know if I would find the time to manage another account.</p>

5. Interview V: Participant 9 and Participant 10 (Couple 5)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 9: 1.5 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 10: Being between Portugal and California definitely affects our relationship, but neither of us has been in a long-distance relationship before, so we try to focus on the positives.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 9: We agreed that we would see each other three times a year while I'm studying in Portugal, and my boyfriend would mostly be the one visiting me. I go back to the States only once a year for the holidays, and other than that, he flies to Europe. Participant 10: Usually, when I comes over, we take short trips around Europe so that we can see as many countries as possible.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 10: We met in person, but shortly after, my girlfriend left to study in Portugal.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 9: From my side, it's education, and for my boyfriend, it's his job back home. However, the main reason is my education, because we're not considering moving to Portugal. So as soon as I finish school, we can be together again, in one place.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 9: I think the lack of sufficient conversations is an issue. We have a huge time difference, and it's hard to find time for longer talks. Plus, we're not available 24/7, so sometimes many messages have to wait a long time for a reply. Participant 10: Additionally, finances. Plane tickets between California and Europe are very expensive, which puts

	a lot of strain on us. We have to give up a lot of little things in our daily lives to be able to save for the flights, especially with the current situation, housing prices, etc.
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SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	<p>Participant 9: Yes, we use WhatsApp and Facebook quite often; in fact, these are the apps we use most frequently to communicate. I could say that it happens every day.</p> <p>Participant 10: Additionally, we use Instagram, but only for sharing photos or memes.</p>
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	<p>Participant 10: On Facebook, I use Facebook Messenger to send text messages and voice messages. Sometimes we video call on Facebook, but we usually do this on WhatsApp.</p> <p>Participant 9: On Instagram, we use the regular private chat to send content to each other. On Facebook I also record lots of voice messages because sometimes I am just too lazy to write.</p>
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	<p>Participant 9: Usually, these are text messages, emojis, or GIFs, but it all depends on the day and the situation.</p> <p>Participant 10: Exactly, for example, recently, with all the talk about the presidential elections, we send each other different articles, posts on the topic, or memes. It all depends on the day and situation.</p> <p>Participant 9: We also send photos and short videos. On Instagram, we constantly send each other pictures like “look what I'm eating” or “see where I am.”</p>
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	<p>Participant 9: Yes, we send a lot of memes. I don't know if it's an “American thing” or if it's normal, but we exchange memes all the time.</p> <p>Participant 10: I agree; it's important to us because, frankly speaking, humour is important to us. My</p>

	girlfriend also often mentions that most of her friends in Portugal aren't native speakers, so sometimes she misses out on the jokes, and I hope I provide that with the memes.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	Participant 10: It all depends on our daily schedule and whether it's a weekend or the middle of the week, but I can confidently say that we communicate nonstop, except when one of us is sleeping.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Participant 9: Smartphones.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Participant 9: I don't think so. Participant 10: I don't think so either.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Participant 10: To some extent, probably yes. Maybe not fully, but in some way. Participant 9: For me, not really. I miss my boyfriend a lot, and honestly, I can't wait to come back home because the distance is really hard for me. Social media make communication easier and provide some form of interaction, but I still feel the distance between us very much.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	Participant 9: Nothing comes to mind. Participant 10: Same here.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart.	Participant 9: That's quite a difficult question. I think this cyberspace does exist in our relationship because we mainly communicate online, but I can't

<p>With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>really compare it to physical spaces like being in the same house or sitting on a park bench together.</p> <p>Participant 10: I agree, I'd rather not even think about it because then it feels like our relationship is more virtual than real.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Participant 9: Not really. Participant 10: I also don't think so, we usually rely on friends' recommendations.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 9: Definitely not. Participant 10: I agree; it doesn't matter to me at all.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 10: It depends on what kind of emotional engagement we're talking about. Generally, the answer is yes because even a message saying "I love you" is an expression of emotion, but it depends on what people expect in a relationship.</p> <p>Participant 9: I agree, of course, there's the option to chat, record voice messages, or make a video call, so we can express emotions with words. However, I miss the closeness, gestures, and physicality.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain</p>	<p>Participant 9: To some extent, yes, but for me, it's only sufficient at the moment. I can build emotional intimacy through expressing words,</p>

<p>emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>but it's only enough because I know I'll be returning to my country soon, and we'll be together again. In the long term, though, I don't think it's possible to maintain emotional intimacy solely through social media. Participant 10: I feel the same way; it's okay for a short, specific period, but definitely not for longer.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 9: Not really. Sometimes, we post on Instagram Stories when we're together, for example, exploring new places, but we don't usually publish posts. Participant 10: I think the main reason is that both my girlfriend and I generally don't post much. We're both interested in photography, so most of our published photos don't feature us or anyone we know; we prefer to keep our private lives to ourselves.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 9: Definitely offline. Participant 10: I agree, offline interaction is incomparable to online interactions. Nothing can replace holding hands, hugging, or even a kiss on the forehead.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 10: No, a long-distance relationship is new for us, and neither of us has had this need in the past, so sexting would also be new. Participant 9: Exactly, neither of us had serious partners before, so we didn't do it before and we don't do it now. I've always had doubts about privacy online and fear that explicit photos could end up in the wrong hands.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching</p>	<p>Participant 9: We organize such activities, for example, during our birthdays—we blow out the candles on the cake over the camera or drink cocktails together. Additionally, on</p>
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<p>movie and commenting it on a chat.</p> <p>With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>occasions like Valentine's Day or even when I pass an exam.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 9: I think it depends on who we're talking about. It's mainly my boyfriend who visits me, so when I introduce him to my friends here, they end up following each other. Unfortunately, I haven't had as many opportunities since the beginning of our relationship to meet his friends, so I mostly know them from stories, and I will only meet them when I return.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 10: Definitely, to some extent. I might not be constantly messaging them or having conversations, but each time I come to Portugal, I meet my girlfriend's friends, and the conversations are indeed more relaxed. For example, I might see on Instagram that someone has just been to Italy or visited their home country, so it's always easy to start a conversation like "How did you like Italy?" or "How was it at home? Did you spend a lot of time with your family?"</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 9: For me it's the ability to communicate and exchange photos. Participant 10: I agree, like, for example, when I'm cooking, I take a photo, and my girlfriend immediately knows what I'm cooking, or I send her a picture with a caption like, "Guess where I am?" I think it gives continuity to our communication and the feeling that whenever I want to talk to her, there are always channels through which I can do it.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 9: No. Participant 10: For me, it's not important either, but the time difference has its effect, so I don't pay too much attention to it. I just send a</p>

	message and wait for a response when she's available.
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SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Participant 9: Fortunately, we haven't had such a situation yet. Participant 10: I confirm, we haven't had any.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Participant 10: We follow them, but neither of us had a truly meaningful relationship with someone before — rather just flings and situationships.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	Participant 10: I think there are many unofficial rules that we don't talk about, but they are clear from the start. Of course, I wouldn't accept it if my girlfriend was posting nude photos on social media, but these are more unspoken rules that we don't need to discuss. Participant 9: Exactly, for example, I wouldn't accept it if he used OnlyFans or something like that, but such things are pretty clear to us and usually come up in jokes rather than deep conversations.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Participant 9: No, it doesn't happen; when we're together, we try to give 100% and devote all our time to each other.
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Participant 9: We haven't had such situations, really. Participant 10: I also think we haven't had any.

<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 10: Probably in some way, yes, but it depends more on the user than on the platform itself. Participant 9: I agree, as long as someone has common sense, it doesn't really apply to them.</p>
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<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
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<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Participant 9: I think in a positive way; it gives us space to talk, and since we're not fans of the distance, we use social media a lot to maintain our relationship. Participant 10: Exactly, I think social media have a positive impact because there is endless content that we can share. Additionally, now each platform has lots of features like video or voice recording, so it definitely helps us with the distance.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 10: I think negatively; of course, it wouldn't be the end of the world — people in the past used to go away to study and managed long distance, but social media make it much easier in a relationship.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 9: Nothing comes to mind. Participant 10: Same for me.</p>

6. Interview VI: Participant 11 and Participant 12 (Couple 6)

<p>SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS</p>	
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<p>How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 11: We've been together for 2.5 years.</p>
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What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	<p>Participant 12: It is between South Africa and Portugal.</p> <p>Participant 11: The flight costs make it difficult to stay connected, but we find creative ways to bridge the gap.</p>
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	<p>Participant 11: We see each other three times a year due to the high cost of plane tickets. Neither of us has a steady income yet, so it takes careful planning and saving</p> <p>Participant 12: Yes, only three times a year, mostly during holidays or long weekends.</p>
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	<p>Participant 11: We met face-to-face, actually. A chance encounter during a study abroad program sparked our connection.</p> <p>Participant 12: Yes, we met in person! It was during an international student event in Portugal, and we instantly clicked.</p>
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	<p>Participant 12: I'm currently in South Africa for my studies, while my partner is finishing her degree in Portugal.</p>
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	<p>Participant 11: Finances are a huge struggle; plane tickets are expensive, and with no steady income, we have to carefully budget to see each other.</p> <p>Participant 12: Definitely the cost of travel. The lack of regular physical closeness also takes an emotional toll on us both.</p>

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	<p>Participant 11: Yes, we use social media daily to stay in touch. It's our lifeline, really.</p> <p>Participant 12: Absolutely, every day. We rely on it heavily since it's our primary mode of communication.</p>
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and	<p>Participant 12: We use Instagram for sharing photos and stories, and Facebook Messenger for video calls and voice notes.</p>

Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	Participant 11: Facebook Messenger is great for longer chats and video calls, while Instagram keeps things fun and visual.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	Participant 11: We share everything from daily selfies to funny memes, as well as articles and videos we find interesting. Participant 12: Mostly photos of our day-to-day lives, cute animals, some videos.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Participant 11: Yes, memes are our way of laughing together, long-distance laughing I would call it.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	Participant 12: We check in frequently, send voice notes and pictures during our breaks, and have a longer chat or video call in the evening.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Participant 11: Smartphone – it's always with me, so I can respond quickly. Participant 12: Smartphone as well, it's the most convenient for staying connected all day.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Participant 11: Yes, it makes me feel like he is there and he can respond whenever I need it. Participant 12: Yeah. It gives a sense of her presence even when we're far away from each other.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Participant 11: To some extent, yes. It can never replace physical presence, but it helps. Participant 12: That's right. Maybe it is not perfect but social media can make me feel like we're together, at least emotionally.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or	Participant 11: When we had a surprise video call during my birthday

<p>Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>celebration, it felt almost like he was there. Participant 12: Yeah, she was so happy about it! Small things can really make a difference.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 12: Cyberspace is definitely our shared space, a virtual home where we spend time together, chat together, talk about every single thing. Participant 11: Yes, I agree. For me it is like a huge memory book. Whenever I forget something that we talked about I can find it in the messages. Even when I’m looking for a present for him or something, I will scroll through the messages and find what he likes. Also, sometimes when I feel sad and miss him a lot, I’m scrolling through the photos in the archive of our chat. I can find there everything about our relationship so it serves as our shared space.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Participant 12: Yes, we have. Recently we went to Porto and we got all food inspirations and trendy places to visit from Instagram. Participant 11: It happens quite often. We also check local events and use the option on Instagram to scroll content based on location, so more or less we can see how every beach look like and if it’s worth visiting.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 12: For sure. Sharing our activities on social media feels like a way to involve our friends and family in our experiences, even though we’re far apart.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 11: Yes, through photos, videos, and emojis that convey what words sometimes cannot. Participant 12: But for me it is especially with stories and live videos where I can instantly show what I'm feeling.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 11: Yes, they help keep the emotional connection alive through constant interaction. Participant 12: Definitely, the instant messaging and sharing features make us feel emotionally closer.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 12: I share some photos and updates on Facebook and Instagram because I enjoy celebrating our relationship and keeping everyone updated. Participant 11: Absolutely, I share photos of us on Instagram. The main reason is that I love showcasing my relationship and special moments. It's like creating a digital love story. I love looking at our photos.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 12: Offline is definitely easier for me. There's something about being physically present that makes it simpler. I can see her facial expressions and feel her touch, which makes emotional conversations more genuine. Participant 11: I'd say offline, too. Online, it's easy for messages to be misunderstood or feel less personal, so I really value the depth of offline interactions.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 12: Yeah, we do a bit. Let's be real, sex is a part of a relationship and since we can't be physical right now, we try to make up for it as best as we can. Participant 11: Sex is important, and since we can't be together physically, we try to fill that gap in other ways.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 11: We don't usually do that kind of stuff on Instagram or Facebook. If we do anything like that, it's more about multitasking—like watching a movie on Netflix while texting each other about it.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 12: Totally! With Facebook and Instagram, it's like we've got this virtual bridge between Cape Town and Lisbon. We can follow each other's friends, tag each other in posts, and even share cool spots from our cities. It's awesome because I get to see who's important to my partner, and she gets to know my friends in South Africa.</p> <p>Participant 11: It feels like we're all connected, even if we're on different continents. It's a cool way to build a shared network of friends and family.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 11: For sure. It's like I get a sneak peek into their world, which makes visits and conversations way smoother. It's like I'm already part of their circle before I even meet them in person.</p> <p>Participant 12: I totally agree.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 12: We can share daily updates, tag each other in funny memes, and have video calls that make us feel like we're actually in the same room.</p> <p>Participant 11: It's also a great way to keep the relationship dynamic with spontaneous video calls and funny posts, which makes the distance a bit more bearable.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 11: Definitely. It's like having a constant, ongoing conversation, which is really important for keeping our connection alive.</p>

	Participant 12: Yes, it's super important. Instant messaging helps us stay in touch no matter where we are.
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SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
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Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Participant 12: Not really. We trust each other a lot, so social media interactions don't usually make us feel jealous. We know that it's all just part of keeping in touch with friends and family, and we're both secure in our relationship.
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Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Participant 11: We don't keep track on exes or past emotional connections. It's just not something we're interested in, as we prefer to focus on our current relationship. Participant 12: That's right.
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Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	Participant 11: We don't have strict rules, but we do agree on a few things. Like, we try to avoid posting too much personal information about each other and make sure we're both comfortable with what gets shared. Participant 12: Yes, exactly. We keep it pretty relaxed, but we do have some boundaries.
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Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Participant 12: Yes, there have been moments when I felt my girlfriend was a bit distracted by her phone. It can feel a bit annoying because I felt ignored. Participant 11: I admit that sometimes I am overusing my phone, and especially social media, but I am trying to work on it.
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Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your	Participant 11: Maybe a comment or a post was misinterpreted, leading to a small argument. But we usually clear things up quickly by talking on video call.
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partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Participant 12: Yes, we had some misunderstandings, but it wasn't a big deal.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	Participant 11: Yes, maybe if one of us is always online and interacting with others, it might feel like the other person is being left out. Usually, I am the one who causes these situations. Participant 12: Yes. It's crucial to manage how much time we spend on social media.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA	
How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	Participant 11: Instagram and Facebook definitely have their ups and downs. On the plus side, they help us stay connected and share little moments of our lives, which keeps us feeling close. On the downside, sometimes it feels like we're comparing our relationship to others, which can be a bit of a downer. Participant 12: I agree. I'd say they have a mixed impact. On one hand, being able to share and see daily updates makes our connection feel more immediate, which is satisfying. But on the other hand, if we're not careful, it can sometimes lead to distractions that affect our satisfaction.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	Participant 12: I think that it would mean losing the daily snapshots and quick updates that help us feel connected. Participant 11: I think it would be a bit of both. Without social media, we'd probably more focused time together, which could enhance our relationship. But we'd also miss out on the easy ways to share our lives and stay updated with each other's day-to-day activities.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently	Participant 11: I don't really know. Participant 12: I also cannot think of something.

missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	
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7. Interview VII: Participant 13 and Participant 14 (Couple 7)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 14: We've been together for 3 years now.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 13: We live in different countries. The distance is between Poland and Brazil. Participant 14: It surely requires more planning compared to normal relationships.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 14: We manage to see each other roughly three times annually. Participant 13: We mostly alternate between visiting each other's countries and sometimes meet in other places.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 13: We met online through a dating app while I was on vacation in Brazil.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 14: We are both established in our careers so this is the main reason, but we are also very connected to our families.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 13: I think that it's mostly not being able to share everyday moments. Participant 14: I agree, but also our financial situation. We spend a lot of money on visiting each other.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Participant 13: Yes, we use Facebook regularly, especially for video calls and messaging. Participant 14: We also use WhatsApp quite often.

How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	<p>Participant 14: Mostly for instant messaging and occasional video calls on Facebook. We don't use Instagram as much.</p> <p>Participant 14: Yes, we only use Instagram from time to time, for example to exchange memes.</p>
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	<p>Participant 13: Some random photos that we take during the day, interesting articles, and sometimes some funny videos.</p> <p>Participant 14: Occasionally we share moments from our days and we exchange a lot of messages.</p>
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	<p>Participant 14: From time to time yes. We use Instagram for this, but it doesn't happen very often.</p> <p>Participant 13: I agree, but I don't think that it is important part of our relationship.</p>
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	<p>Participant 13: We message each other throughout the day and have video calls about twice a week.</p> <p>Participant 14: Exactly, daily check-ins via messages, and video calls a few times a week, everything depends on our work schedule, number of projects etc.</p>
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	<p>Participant 13: I mainly use my smartphone.</p> <p>Participant 14: Me too.</p>

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	<p>Participant 14: I think it does make me feel a bit closer, just knowing she is online and ready to respond.</p> <p>Participant 13: I think I disagree, for me it doesn't matter at all.</p>
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and	<p>Participant 13: It helps somewhat, but there is still a big gap that social media can't fill.</p>

<p>create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 14: For me it's whenever we have a video call, it felt like we were side-by-side. Participant 13: That's true. I think it's the best feature of Facebook for couples because I can hear and see him, it is way easier than interpreting messages.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 13: Yes, it's a place where we can communicate despite the distance. We don't share flats or even the same city so it is actually the only place that we share at the moment. Participant 14: I also look at this from the same perspective, let's hope that soon we will be able to share physical space rather than virtual, but for now it is what it is.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Participant 14: Definitely, we planned a trip inspired by photos we saw on social media. After that we were quite satisfied with all of the recommendations on social media and we continue planning travels based on social media content. Participant 13: That is true, but I also check a lot of restaurants on social media, before we go there. Based on their profiles we can see how food looks like. Also most of the restaurants post their menu on social media, so we can check the prices etc.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 13: Not really, the motivation comes from spending time together, not from sharing it online. Participant 14: I totally agree.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 13: Yes, through messages, emojis, and video calls, we can express emotions. Participant 14: For me it is only to some extent. For example, through chat and video, but it still lacks the depth of face-to-face interaction.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 14: It helps maintain connection, but it's limited in building deeper intimacy. Participant 13: I think the same.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 13: Yes, we share some photos to celebrate moments or we post photos from our travels, but not frequently. Participant 14: Yes, we only do this occasionally, mainly to mark some special events.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 13: Easier offline because of body language and immediate feedback. Participant 14: Definitely offline; it feels more natural.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 14: Yes, it plays a role in keeping our connection intimate. Participant 13: I agree, I think that it's very important for partners who live far away. In a way you want the person even more and more, so once we meet in real life I think we are more hyped for sexual interactions.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used</p>	<p>Participant 13: Yes, we have done virtual dinners over video calls. It's a great way to replace physical dates that we can't have on a daily basis.</p>
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Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	
Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	Participant 14: Yes, we are connected to each other's friends online. Participant 13: Exactly, I add friends of my boyfriend whenever I meet them.
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?	Participant 14: It helps break the ice when we meet face-to-face. Participant 13: Exactly!
In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	Participant 13: I think that the most important is staying updated on each other's lives. Participant 14: Also being able to communicate instantly.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Participant 13: Very important, it's our main form of daily communication.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Participant 13: Sometimes yes, when there is interaction with others that feels too friendly. Participant 14: Especially when with people I don't know or my girlfriend doesn't know.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Participant 13: I do not, but knowing that he does would make me uncomfortable. Participant 14: No, I don't and I wouldn't want her to feel uncomfortable either.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	Participant 13: Yes, we agreed not to follow ex-partners and to be transparent about new connections. Participant 14: Exactly, but besides that we don't have any other rules established.

Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Participant 14: I've noticed it occasionally, and it can feel like a lack of attention. Participant 13: Yes, it happens rarely but when it happens during our conversations it is frustrating.
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Participant 13: Yes, misinterpretations over text have caused small arguments. Participant 14: Yeah, especially with text messages, where tone can be hard to understand.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	Participant 13: Yes, overuse or misunderstandings can lead to conflicts and insecurity I think. Participant 14: Definitely.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	Participant 14: It's a mix; they help stay connected but are also a source of frustration sometimes. Participant 13: That's right. Mainly because they help us communicate but can also cause some minor misunderstandings.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	Participant 13: It would probably be negative, as we rely on them for communication. Participant 14: That's a very good question. I feel like there is a lot to complain about when it comes to social media, but without them, it would be difficult to maintain the same level of communication in our relationship as we have with them.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Participant 14: Better privacy controls to feel more secure sharing personal moments. Participant 13: Yes, that would be the best.

8. Interview VIII: Participant 15 and Participant 16 (Couple 8)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 15: We have been in a relationship for two years, and except for the first two weeks, it has been long-distance from the start.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 16: Between Munich and Tilburg. It's not a huge distance, but it does significantly affect our relationship because there's already a difference between living in different cities, let alone different countries. Participant 15: I totally agree.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Participant 16: On average, we see each other every two months. We usually take turns visiting each other. We often travel by Flixbus, or sometimes I drive to my girlfriend's place. Participant 15: Exactly, even though the journey takes around 8-9 hours, it's definitely worth it in the end.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 15: We met in person when my boyfriend was in the Netherlands on a student exchange. Unfortunately, we only managed to meet when his exchange was coming to an end.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Participant 16: Mainly work and a lack of savings for relocation.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Participant 15: At the moment, it's definitely a financial obstacle. We are currently just out of university, and the pay is not great compared to the cost of living. Participant 16: I absolutely agree; if we could afford it financially, we would visit each other much more often.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Yes, we definitely use social media a lot. We mainly communicate via WhatsApp and Instagram, but we also occasionally exchange messages on Facebook or send each other TikToks from time to time.</p> <p>Participant 16: We also have the BeReal app. It doesn't have many communication features, but we can see what each of us is doing at a given moment.</p>
<p>How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?</p>	<p>Participant 16: On Facebook, we only use the chat, but very rarely.</p> <p>Participant 15: Yes, we mainly use Instagram. We use it fully, from video calls to sending posts and recording voice messages.</p>
<p>What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Definitely a lot of photos and videos. If something during the day makes us laugh or catches our interest, we record it and send it to each other.</p> <p>Participant 16: I agree, that's pretty much how we create entire conversations — a mix of text messages, photos, and videos. I must admit that most of the time we talk about random stuff, but after all, couples who live together also have these kinds of interactions.</p>
<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 16: We love memes!</p> <p>Participant 15: Exactly, we love sharing memes, especially those with dark humor.</p> <p>Participant 16: I think it's super important because it gives us the chance to laugh together. Sometimes, we also refer to specific conversations or past situations, or we mock other people.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Participant 15: The best answer is probably all the time. From morning till night. Sometimes even in the middle of the night, if I can't sleep, I might text or call my boyfriend.</p>

	Participant 16: That's right, we don't really have a set routine; we just write spontaneously, about every little thing.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Participant 15: iPhones.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE	
Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Participant 15: Not really, we talk all the time, but I never pay attention to whether my boyfriend is online or not; I just message him whenever. Participant 16: Same here, I never pay attention to that either.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Participant 15: I think so. Definitely because of the option to send photos, short videos, and talk via video chat. Participant 16: I agree, especially for me, it's the video chat. We use it quite a lot, and it gives me a sense of closeness.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	Participant 16: I think it's when we fall asleep with the camera on. Participant 15: Same for me! It's very nice when we lie in our beds with the lights off and talk until one of us falls asleep. It almost feels like we're in the same bed, talking before going to sleep after a long day.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?	Participant 16: Of course. All the messages and photos that are on our chats are like a shared space for our relationship. Participant 15: I agree as well.
Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on	Participant 16: Yes! We get inspired by Instagram all the time. We love concerts and music festivals. We often check where an artist we like will be

<p>the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>playing or we discover new festivals through Instagram. Participant 15: Last year, I was even convinced to go to Oktoberfest, even though I had heard bad reviews. My boyfriend sent me a few Reels, and it actually looked fun. In the end, we went there, and it was awesome.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Not really, of course, we post stories and photos from festivals or trips, but I wouldn't say it's the main motivation or any motivation at all. Participant 16: Same for me, I definitely don't see it as motivation, but I do post different kinds of content when we do things.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 15: We can definitely express emotions during video calls on Instagram. For me, text messages are not enough; I need to hear and see him, and this feature allows me to do that. Participant 16: For me as well, video chat is the main feature that lets us express emotions, but I also appreciate a sweet emoji or a nice message.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 15: I think so; it's actually the only channel that allows us to fully express our emotions. Of course, there's also WhatsApp with its video chat feature, but on Instagram, we have a continuous conversation with photos attached, etc. It somehow creates a big timeline of our relationship, almost like a browser history. Participant 16: I feel the same way. The continuity and richness of the conversation, with all kinds of multimedia, help us maintain emotional intimacy. It's also something that belongs to us; we share it together, and no one else has access to it. Participant 15: At least we hope that no one else has access to it.</p>

<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 15: We don't have our relationship status on Facebook, but that's because Facebook is kind of outdated for us. We don't update our profiles, and I think the last time I changed my status was when I was 16.</p> <p>Participant 16: I agree, but on Instagram, we show our relationship without any barriers. After all, we're happy, so why should we hide it?</p> <p>Participant 15: For me, it's also a way of showing that we are taken. I like it when my boyfriend posts pictures with me because I know it shows other girls that he's not available.</p> <p>Participant 16: I feel the same way; it's nice to know that I appear on her feed and that other men might lose interest because of it.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 16: I think it depends on the situation. If we're talking about positive emotions, it's easier to express them offline, but when it comes to arguments, I prefer to have them online. It gives us time to cool down.</p> <p>Participant 16: Exactly, I agree with every word.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 16: Yes, quite often. Sex has always been important to us because neither I nor my girlfriend could imagine being with someone if we weren't compatible in bed. However, right now our options are limited, so we do it online.</p> <p>Participant 15: We usually start with messages, and sometimes even photos or videos. For me, it's important because it creates a sense of tension, and I get even more excited before meeting, knowing there's something to look forward to.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as</p>	<p>Participant 15: Yes! We organize a lot of these kinds of activities. I have to admit, sometimes we even take</p>
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<p>organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>showers at the same time while having a video call. There's no sexual undertone to it, but we talk to each other and get ready to go out. Participant 16: I see we're putting all the cards on the table! But back to the topic, we also sometimes organize online dates, especially on special occasions like Valentine's Day. We're not master chefs, so we often order food delivery, eat, and drink beer or wine while on a video chat.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Absolutely! We already have many mutual friends on Instagram, and we interact regularly with some of them.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 16: Of course! It's the best way to start a conversation since we know what's going on in their lives from their Instagram profiles. Participant 15: I see it the same way. I've never really thought about it before, but I do feel more comfortable because I feel like I know a lot about them.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 15: I think it's the fact that we communicate nonstop. We can constantly send each other things and exchange messages. It gives the feeling that I have my boyfriend in my pocket and that he's always there, and it's just an iPhone. Participant 16: Same for me; thanks to Instagram, we communicate without interruptions and are truly able to maintain our relationship.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 16: Yes, it's very important. Participant 15: For me too, because we have continuous conversations there, without hours of waiting for a response.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Participant 16: Not really, I trust my boyfriend, and he has never put me in a situation where I would be worried. Participant 15: I haven't had such a situation either. I think we care about each other enough that we try to avoid such situations. However, being in a long-distance relationship exposes us to many more risks than a normal one, so this is the minimum we try to avoid.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p> <p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Participant 16: No, we decided not to do that. It gives a sense of comfort on both sides.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Other than removing our ex-partners from our followers' list, we don't have any other rules.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Participant 15: Not really, when we are together, we focus on each other, not on social media. Participant 16: I agree.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 16: Not really. Participant 15: I also can't think of anything.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 15: I think they hurt relationships that aren't long-distance more. In long-distance relationships, social media has so many advantages that they generally help rather than hurt.</p>

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA	
How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	<p>Participant 15: Social media boost our relationship satisfaction 100%. They are a huge help in being apart.</p> <p>Participant 16: I think so too, definitely all positives.</p>
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	<p>Participant 16: I don't even want to think about such a situation. I hope no one is planning to remove all social media platforms, because then we would definitely have to find better jobs and visit each other more often.</p>
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	<p>Participant 15: Not really.</p> <p>Participant 16: Me too.</p>

9. Interview IX: Participant 17 and Participant 18 (Couple 9)

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	<p>Participant 17: As of now, it's almost 4 years, although we had a year in between when we lived in the same place.</p> <p>Participant 18: Yes, that was exactly the second year of our relationship, and after that, we separated again.</p>
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	<p>Participant 18: It all depends on our current financial and work situations. During the first year, we saw each other at least once a month, and in the second year, we lived together.</p> <p>Participant 17: The third year was the worst because I was looking for a new job, and our finances were limited. But now, we can say that we see each other regularly, on average once every two months.</p>

Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Participant 20: Face-to-face, during holidays.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	<p>Participant 17: Currently, I live in Poland, and my partner lives in Germany.</p> <p>Participant 18: However, it's worth noting that due to work and university, we had greater distances in the past, for example, between the Canary Islands and Germany.</p>
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	<p>Participant 18: At the moment, it's work. We are slowly thinking about moving together to Poland, but in my profession, it's not easy to find a job in English, and I don't speak Polish.</p> <p>Participant 17: Exactly, from my side, I have a very stable and well-paid job in Poland and a career path that my partner's boss in Germany doesn't offer. So we can definitely say that work is the main factor in our separation.</p>
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	<p>Participant 18: For me, it's definitely missing my partner. Sometimes I just want to be physically close, but it is just impossible.</p> <p>Participant 17: I agree with that. Additionally, the fact that we are in a relationship, but it's not comparable to relationships where couples live in the same place. Sometimes I want to do something with my boyfriend, even just go to the movies or cook dinner together, and I know that I have to wait for that, sometimes a month or more.</p>

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	<p>Participant 17: Yes, definitely. I must admit that we mainly communicate through social media, mainly Instagram, and we use it daily.</p> <p>Participant 18: I agree 100%. Occasionally, we call each other or also message on WhatsApp. Usually, this involves forwarding messages from other chats, such as our family chats, or</p>
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	<p>when one of us doesn't respond on Instagram, we call on WhatsApp to make sure everything is okay.</p>
<p>How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?</p>	<p>Participant 18: We hardly use Facebook for communication, but we fully utilize Instagram. Sometimes I feel like we use this app 100%. We use the chat as our main communicator and the video chat function.</p> <p>Participant 17: We also often take photos and send them at specific moments. For example, when I see something interesting or funny, I send a picture to my partner via Instagram Direct.</p>
<p>What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?</p>	<p>Participant 17: For me, the biggest advantage of Instagram is that we can share Reels. We often talk about what we want to cook together when we see each other and browse recipes on Instagram, sending each other recipes in the form of Reels.</p> <p>Participant 18: I totally agree. Instagram also has so many different accounts, both private and business. We often send each other clothes or gadgets from various brands' and ask for each other's opinions before buying.</p>
<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 17: Of course!</p> <p>Participant 18: Totally! Humour is very important to us, and honestly, we don't have a day without sending each other memes.</p> <p>Participant 17: I agree with that. Humour is very important for our relationship. Sometimes we send each other memes to lift our spirits. I must admit, we share a very specific type of humour, and there are many memes that I would only send to my partner and not to others.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Participant 17: I usually wake up in the morning and check Instagram. My partner starts work earlier than I do, so I know there will already be something waiting for me, often a message like "good morning" or something similar. Later, during work, we don't message</p>

	<p>much, but often during lunch or coffee breaks, we send each other some memes. After work, we try to video chat at least once a day.</p> <p>Participant 18: Exactly, we usually interact almost throughout the entire day. I must admit that Instagram is the first app I open on my phone in the morning and the last one I close at night. We send each other almost every little thing that happens to us during the day on the chat. Sometimes we use WhatsApp, for instance, to quickly make a phone call when we're booking flight tickets or something like that, but it happens rarely, so I wouldn't count it as 'daily interactions.'</p>
<p>What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)</p>	<p>Participant 18: Smartphone. Participant 17: Agree!</p>

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

<p>Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?</p>	<p>Participant 17: In a way, it does affect me. When I see that my boyfriend is active, I can immediately write to him, and I know he will respond at that moment. Indeed, it can make me feel closer to him.</p> <p>Participant 18: I agree, but for me, it's also very tricky because sometimes I just go on social media for a second and immediately appear as active. We've had times when one of us got annoyed with the other for not replying, but we just had other important things to do at the moment.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>Participant 18: In a sense, yes. I mean, what choice do we really have? I can't imagine maintaining this relationship by writing letters or only having the possibility to make phone calls. Social media have many features</p>

	<p>that allow us to experience moments 'together,' exchange photos, etc.</p> <p>Participant 17: I think that gap will never be fully bridged, but social media help us a lot on a daily basis. Additionally, I think it's not only when we are apart, but even when we are in the same city, for example, one of us goes to the supermarket while the other stays at home. We can easily send each other lists of products we want to buy or just communicate through social media.</p>
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Definitely, when we send each other sentimental content that relates to our private situations. Sometimes we see, for example, Reels from the place where we met or photos from a restaurant where we had a great date. We can then jointly reminisce about those moments.</p> <p>Participant 17: Exactly. Additionally, I find the use of emojis very sweet. Depending on our mood, we can send each other hearts or specific emojis that have meaning for us. In a way, I feel embraced and feel that there's a bond between us.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 18: In our case, cyberspace is partly the main space for conversations and interactions. In our current situation, about 90% of our conversations are conducted online because we can't meet often.</p> <p>Participant 17: I agree with this. If you think about it, 'normal' couples have the possibility of talking and interacting at home, on a walk, during time spent together. In our case, communication mainly relies on the internet, so this online space is our shared bubble on which we base our communication. It's not an ideal solution compared to people who live, for example, in the same apartment, but it is still a form of shared space. It is</p>

	definitely a shared space for interactions.
Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?	Participant 17: We do this all the time! Usually, before every meeting, we browse Instagram and look at both restaurants and activities we can do. Additionally, it helps us find accommodations for trips and reunions. We like to stay in hostels and check on Instagram what they look like, if they are social, etc. Participant 18: We also often follow event profiles and local music festivals.
Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?	Participant 17: I wouldn't say it's the main driver, but I do have that feeling to some extent. I often take photos when we spend time together and post them on Instagram. I want to share it with the world and show people that we are happy and active. Participant 18: I definitely don't have that feeling. I rarely post content on my profile, but my girlfriend does all the work for both of us.

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	Participant 18: To some extent, yes. We always try to communicate something nice, send a heart, a nice message, or call each other on video chat to see each other. Participant 17: Sometimes we also send each other 'sweet and nice' content, like memes related to relationships or cute movie clips
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	Participant 18: It's hard to say. I think emotions are expressed both through words and gestures. In the case of social media, we can definitely express emotions through words, but not gestures. There is a difference between seeing someone on a photo or during a video chat and physically hugging them. It's also different to get a message saying "I love you" in chat versus hearing it face-to-face.

	<p>Certainly, to some extent, I can express emotions through social media, but it's not as satisfying as in real life.</p> <p>Participant 17: I agree with that. I feel that social media have so many possibilities that they allow us to maintain a minimum level of emotional expression. However, without this minimum, our relationship would not exist. Therefore, to some extent, new technologies satisfy our emotional needs, but they are incomparable, as my boyfriend said, to expressing emotions face-to-face.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Participant 18: In my case, it doesn't happen often. I openly communicate my relationship on social media, but I just don't like to publish many moments from my private life.</p> <p>Participant 17: I am the opposite in this regard. I really like to communicate that we are together. I often publish our joint photos from trips and shared moments. It's hard for me to say what the main motivation for this is. I think, in part, I want to show others that we are happy.</p> <p>Participant 18: I think, in addition, this way we also communicate that we are taken. Potential people who might be interested in us know right away that we are in a relationship and not single, so we avoid uncomfortable situations and confrontations.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Participant 17: That's a very good question. It seems to me that it all depends on the type of emotions. For me personally, communicating positive emotions or expressing love is easier face-to-face. Maybe not easier, but definitely more enjoyable. As for negative emotions, our conflicts, pointing things out to each other – in this case, I prefer to solve them online because I always have time to think about my response. I am a rather explosive person, and communication</p>

	<p>on social media gives me time for reflection and to think over my answers.</p> <p>Participant 18: I agree with that. I am a rather conciliatory person, but my partner often couldn't control her emotions during face-to-face arguments. I prefer when we try to reach a compromise in an online environment and then calmly return to the topic when we see each other in real life after we've had time to cool down.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Yes, it happens, maybe not as often as at the beginning of the relationship, but after all, we have our sexual needs. In a long-distance relationship, it's hard to be sexually satisfied because we rarely see each other. I think that to some extent, sexting can provide us with sexual satisfaction.</p> <p>Participant 17: I would like to add that for me, sexting builds a kind of tension. When we are apart, we tease each other step by step with different types of messages, and I have the impression that when we finally see each other, sex is much more exciting. It's something we look forward to, and through photos and messages, we remind each other that it's worth the wait.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used</p>	<p>Participant 18: We often have 'online dates' on Instagram Direct video chat. Usually, we cook something or order food and have a date on video chat. Sometimes, we just drink wine and talk.</p> <p>Participant 17: Yes, that's true. There are also times when we stay connected on a video chat while doing other activities. For example, when I go for a</p>
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<p>Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>walk, I call him on the video chat, and he goes for a walk too. Participant 18: Yes, definitely, multitasking is our thing.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Yes, absolutely. We follow all our closest friends and even family members who have an account on Instagram.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner’s friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Participant 17: In a way, yes. Although I don't often talk to my partner's friends, I see what they do daily, where they travel, and what interests them on social media. It makes it easier for me to find common topics when we meet in person. Participant 18: Same for me. Sometimes even a few comments or responses to stories make a difference. I feel that this way it is easier for us to maintain a shared network of friends and feel more comfortable with them in real life</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Many communication options. I feel that social media are rich in visual content. Participant 17: I agree. Additionally, being almost constantly connected to the internet means we can stay in touch at any moment. Theoretically, we are separated by distance, but I feel that I can reach out to my boyfriend anytime and get a response.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Many communication options. I feel that social media are rich in visual content. Participant 17: I agree. Additionally, being almost constantly connected to the internet means we can stay in touch at any moment. Theoretically, we are separated by distance, but I feel that I can reach out to my boyfriend anytime and get a response.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Yes, we had one situation when my ex-girlfriend contacted me on social media. Participant 17: Yes, I was very jealous then. It was at the beginning of our relationship, and I didn't feel as confident in it as I do now.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p> <p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Yes, we follow them. At this point, we are in a relationship where we trust each other 100%, but we also respect that we had lives before we met. I think it's not a problem as long as we respect and trust each other. Participant 17: I agree. Our past partners played a significant role in our lives. I think following them on social media is not a problem, but I would have an issue if there were any interactions.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Participant 17: Yes, we allow each other to follow ex-partners, wish them a happy birthday, or respond to simple questions or innocent conversations, but we do not accept flirting. Participant 18: Additionally, our main rule is to be transparent. If any conversation happens with someone who might be interested in something more, we immediately tell each other. We don't want to hide such situations because they can lead to conflicts, and it's hard to rebuild trust.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Participant 18: It happens very rarely. Participant 17: When we have the opportunity to spend time together, we try to make the most of it. I always try to limit phone use during our moments together. Given that we have far fewer opportunities to spend time together compared to other couples, phone addiction or looking at the screen instead of having conversations doesn't affect us.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your</p>	<p>Participant 17: Yes, there were not very significant situations, but they mainly concerned text messages. After all, we don't see facial expressions or</p>

<p>partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>gestures in them, so sometimes the tone of the message can be misinterpreted. Participant 18: I agree. If such misunderstandings occur, we try to arrange a video call so we can clarify the situation.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Participant 18: I don't think that's the case. I see social media rather as tools that help with communication. Participant 17: However, it's worth noting that our relationship is based on trust, so this doesn't apply to us. Maybe for others, social media pose threats.</p>

<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Participant 18: Definitely, a large part of our communication happens on social media. I believe they have a positive impact on the satisfaction of our relationship. Participant 17: In my opinion, they have an impact to some extent. Of course, they are not as significant as other elements of our relationship like love or trust, but in a way, they help us communicate and express those important emotions, so consequently, they positively influence our satisfaction.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>Participant 17: Definitely negatively! Social media offer so many possibilities for couples; communication is diverse and vibrant! Participant 18: I agree with that, although it's also important to maintain balance. In our case, social media definitely have a positive impact, but we don't use them excessively. However, there are probably couples who could focus more on each other rather than their 'online persona.' In such cases, I suspect that social media might have a negative impact, and it</p>

	might be better without them. It all comes down to good balance.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Participant 17: Not really. Participant 18: Nothing comes to mind either

10. Interview X: Participant 19

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	We've been together for three years now.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	I currently live in Indonesia, and my partner lives in Germany.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Unfortunately, due to the distance, we only see each other twice a year. We usually plan our meetings well in advance to avoid expensive flight tickets. We take turns visiting each other; sometimes my boyfriend comes to see me in Indonesia, and other times I go to see him in Germany. Occasionally, we look for destinations 'in the middle' and use these opportunities as joint travel adventures.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met in person during holidays in Europe. At that time, we had a relaxed lifestyle and online studies. After we met, we managed to extend our stay and we travelled together for a month. We both agreed that we wanted to continue the relationship, so after the first month, it transitioned to a more online-based mode.

Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	For both of us is work, I am trying to get a job in Germany, however I am struggling a little bit because I cannot speak German.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Definitely longing. Longing for my partner because I am someone who really needs affection, and because of the distance there is less affection in our relationship.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, we use social media a lot; we talk a lot on Facebook but also sometimes on Instagram. We also do video calls over WhatsApp or FaceTime but mostly we communicate on Instagram and Facebook.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	We use almost all the features, especially chat on Facebook and sending instant photos on Instagram. Sometimes we also record voice messages on Facebook, but for video calls, we use other applications.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	Usually when I send my partner something I inform him about what I'm doing or where I am. Sometimes for example I send photos of what I'm doing and my partner does the same, but because he doesn't really use phone that much, it's less frequent for him, but he does it too, just not as often as me. On Facebook I sometimes share with him content that I have seen on the Facebook Wall, and on Instagram we share a lot of Reels together.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, we do this nearly every day. I think that it is very important for romantic partners, since there is certain type of humor in our relationship. I can say that there are specific memes that I will share with him, and no one else because I know that he is the only one from my close group who will get it. Sometimes he also sends me memes to cheer me up, when I have a bad day

	and he just wants to see the smile on my face.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	It starts when I wake up. I immediately send a quick message on Facebook such as “good morning” or “did you sleep well?” We have around 6h of time difference, so usually when I wake up, he is still sleeping, I never expect him to reply immediately, but I think that it is cute, that he knows that whenever he wakes up, there is already a message from me waiting for him. Later on, we send each other messages including reels and memes over the day, and we try to find time for longer conversation over video or text messages in his evening/my night.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Mainly smartphone, but sometimes we also do video calls over laptop.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER’S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Yes, it does because then he can reply right away, so that makes me feel good knowing we are both online at the same time and we can start the conversation.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	In a way yes, I think that other channels of communication, such as phone call, are not as reach as social media. Through social media we can exchange a lot oof photos, follow our daily routines, check our profiles to see all of the updates and in a way feel closer.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	Yes, sometimes when he posts our photo on his profile, it makes me feel like we are together, close to each other and I know that he is open about our relationship in front of others. Another thing is that, he always sends me a message or photo as soon as he wakes up. I feel very much connected to him in this certain moment, because normally we would just wake up in one

	bed next to each other, but in this way I know that the first thing he does in the morning is thinking about me, despite the distance.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?	Certainly, the cyber space is our shared space. Normal couples share an apartment, a car, or at least live in the same city. Our relationship spans two continents and half the world separates us, so our shared space is essentially the communication that takes place online. While others may share their day's events upon returning home from work, in the living room, on a date, or in bed, for us, these are conversations held online. I feel like the cyber space is our private bubble, equipped with numerous channels that store all our past interactions.
Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?	Yes, this happens very often. For example, when I visit him or he visits me I usually suggest going to those places because I saw or heard good reviews about them and it would be nice to go there together. Usually, we check this type of content on Instagram. I think that Instagram is very rich when it comes to visual content, so we usually check the profile of the restaurant and plan what we want to order, or just get inspired by Reels for future travels, music events and parties in cities that we visit.
Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?	When we are physically together, I try to have quality time with him but sometimes for example when we go out to some nice restaurant or attend some cool event and take pictures, then of course I want to post them with my partner so others can see that we are having great time together!

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you	Yes, absolutely. I believe that even something as simple as liking a message is a way of expressing emotions. Additionally, we often send
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<p>to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>each other emojis like hearts or hugging emojis. I frequently record short videos and send them to my boyfriend. In some of them, I tell him about something exciting that just happened, Sometimes, instead of a video, I send him a voice message on Facebook. It's much easier to understand each other's emotions when we can hear each other's voices, rather than just reading text messages.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Certainly, to some extent. Of course, there are issues like privacy and whether our messages are truly secure. I think in face-to-face communication, I'm not afraid to say anything, whereas in online communication, I often hold back. I'm a person who doesn't trust the internet completely and is always cautious about what I write or post. Nevertheless, social media definitely help us maintain some level of emotional intimacy. At the moment, we need to use these channels to keep our connection strong, so social media are very useful but incomparable to expressing feelings in person.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>On Facebook, I marked on my profile that I'm in a relationship and tagged my boyfriend. Additionally, I post pictures with him both on Instagram and Facebook. I think the main reason for this is that I often share photos from our trips together, but I also keep in mind that by posting about my boyfriend on social media, I'm letting others know that I'm taken. Before we were together, a lot of men would flirt with me on social media, and by showing pictures of my partner, I feel like I'm making it clear that I'm in a relationship. This helps to limit unpleasant situations, such as jealousy from my partner.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>In my opinion, it's easier to express emotions offline. When we're together in person, it's simpler to convey our feelings and understand each other</p>

	<p>fully. Online communication can sometimes lead to misunderstandings because it's harder to interpret tone of the text messages. When we're face-to-face, we can see the expressions on our faces and in general see the body language to understand issues more clearly.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Certainly! There are times when we engage in sexting by sending each other 'spicy' photos. We prefer using features like Instagram's disappearing photo option for extra privacy, ensuring the photos cannot be seen more than once. Sometimes, we also send text messages that can be quite stimulating. It surely helps us maintain a sense of intimacy. It's a way for us to connect on a deeper level, even when we're apart physically. As we are in a long-distance relationship and cannot have physical intimacy too often, somehow, we try to express it over text or pictures.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>Quite often, we watch movies together, but we usually do it via video chat on WhatsApp or FaceTime. On Instagram and Facebook, we also comment in private messages on movies or TV shows we're watching simultaneously. Recently, we frequently comment on soccer matches. I've never been interested in soccer before, but my boyfriend is a fan, and I know it brings him joy when I watch the game alongside him. I send playful emojis, share in the excitement, and experience the emotions together with him via messages. It even happened few times that alongside watching soccer, he keeps sending me memes about some players on Instagram.</p>
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<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, of course; we have social connections - he knows my friends and I know his friends; and yes, indeed many of our friends are on Instagram or Facebook but I would say more so on Instagram. It usually comes natural that once I meet his friends and another way around they will send me invitation on social media and I also invite his friends.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>I feel like it doesn't have a huge impact, but it definitely makes it somewhat easier for me to befriend them if I follow them on Instagram or Facebook. Firstly, I feel that social media profiles often reflect the people who manage them, so it's easier for me to discover their interests, what kind of person they are, etc. Secondly, I rarely see my boyfriend's friends or family face-to-face. Having them on social media allows me to stay involved in their lives and maintain contact even through small interactions like liking a photo or sending a birthday wishes in a message.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>The biggest advantage of social media is the ability to message him and know that even if he's busy, he will still reply and stay informed about what's happening in my life.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Not necessarily, as most of our conversations don't happen in real-time due to the time difference between us. So, while instant messaging is convenient for quick updates or occasional chats, it's not very important for us.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Of course, there have been situations where I felt jealous. Despite being together for three years now, I am a jealous type of person. Sometimes, when I see him tagged in photos with female colleagues on Facebook or Instagram, I find myself asking,</p>
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	"Who's that colleague?". Usually I try to approach it as a joke although obviously it means that I'm jealous.
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p> <p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>No, we do not accept keeping in touch with our ex-partners. Because of the distance, our relationship relies mostly on trust and we believe that following our ex-partners can be seen as a trigger for certain situations and we do not need in our relationship. I kind of feel that keeping up with ex partners is like creating a backup partner, so I prefer to focus my attention on my current boyfriend rather than someone from the past. My boyfriend also respects that and we decided together not to follow our ex-partners.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Well, we do have certain boundaries in our relationship but when it comes to social media usage, we agreed not to follow our ex-partners on social media. Generally, I don't mind if my partner likes posts on social media, unless it's something like a somewhat provocative picture of another girl. If that happens, I might feel a bit hurt and disappointed, though I understand it's not necessarily a major issue.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>No, we do not have this problem. Since we rarely see each other, we appreciate our time together and we try to give 100% of ourselves. We try not to use our phones too often so that we can enjoy quality time together.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>It rarely happens because we communicate openly all the time. Of course, the hardest part is to read emotions, so we only encountered small misunderstanding for example when I interpreted the message in a negative way, while my boyfriend meant something positive etc., but it is not something that happens often. When miscommunication does happen online, we try to give each other time to cool off and then address the issue together later on, usually on the video chat.</p>

<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>In my opinion no because it's like the only channel through which you can communicate when being in two different places. Maybe not the only one, but certainly the most convenient one. I guess that for many there are certain trust issues, but I believe that you cannot be involved in long-distance relationship if you don't truly trust your partner and I see social media more as a channel of communication rather than threat.</p>
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<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Overall, I would say that social media has a positive impact on the quality of my relationship. Surely, it keeps us connected in various interactive ways.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>I think that it might have a negative impact on our relationship because we wouldn't be able to communicate as often. Social media offer many more features beyond just phone calls or messaging. We can share photos, videos, and daily updates that help us feel more involved in each other's lives. Other than that, we could write letters, it would take a while for them to reach the other person. It could take a month, maybe two, who knows? So, I think it would definitely have a negative impact if there were no social media.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>Oh, it is very hard to tell. The only thing that comes into my mind is a lie detector. I mean, it is not that I do not trust my partner, but I don't have as many opportunities to check if he does what he tells me or if he is meeting people that he mentioned in the conversation, or with someone else. It would be also great to use such detector when it comes to describing feelings.</p>

11. Interview XI: Participant 20

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	We've been in a relationship for about two years together.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	I live in Lisbon, Portugal, and she lives in Bologna, Italy. The geographical distance certainly affects our relationship, mainly because it makes communication more challenging. We have to be intentional about maintaining connection despite the physical separation.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We typically see each other every 2-3 months, although this can vary depending on the season and our school schedules. We plan our visits around breaks and holidays, making the most of the time we have together.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We initially met face-to-face, but later lost contact. We reconnected through Instagram, and our relationship grew stronger from there.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	The main reason for our physical separation is education. We are both currently studying in different cities.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	The biggest struggle is communication. Effective communication becomes difficult when you're not physically together, which can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of emotional connection at times.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, we communicate using WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and	We primarily use Instagram for sharing content and texting.

Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	We share a lot of content related to things we can do together in the future, including memes, videos, and shared interests. It's a way to stay connected and plan for the times when we can be together.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, we exchange memes, and it's quite important for our relationship. Sharing something funny that makes us think of each other is a way of saying, 'I was thinking about you,' which helps us feel connected.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	We usually start the day with a good morning text. During school or work hours, we might exchange a few texts, but not much social media interaction happens until after school/work. In the evening, we either have a call or share content on Instagram and TikTok. It's a mix of communication and staying connected through social media.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	We use our smartphones for communication.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Not really. The only time I feel a bit closer to her is during our video calls, especially if we fall asleep with the video on. Hearing her in her sleep gives me a feeling that she's next to me.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	No, social media doesn't fully bridge the gap for me. However, the continuity of our interaction, like video calls, helps a bit.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or	Nothing really comes into my mind.

<p>Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, I suppose you could say that cyberspace acts as our shared space. It's not something I had thought about before, but it does function that way for us.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, we often plan activities like visiting restaurants, events, or vintage stores based on what we see on social media. Sometimes, these plans even extend to more long-term ideas like living in a van, which she keeps suggesting by sending videos.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>No, sharing on social media afterward doesn't really motivate me to participate in activities.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, they do, but it's different from expressing emotions in person. Online, you might use text or emojis, but in person, non-verbal cues can convey emotions more effectively</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain</p>	<p>Yes, in a way, but it's not the same as being together in person. Social media helps us stay connected and express</p>

emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	our emotions, but it doesn't replace the intimacy of face-to-face interaction.
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	Yes, I do share photos with my partner occasionally. It's not about showcasing our relationship, but rather sharing aspects of my life, and she's part of that.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	For me, it's generally easier to express emotions offline because non-verbal communication plays a big role. You don't have to explain yourself as much as you might need to online. However, for positive emotions, it's relatively easy to express them through text as well.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	Yes, we do engage in sexting, and it helps to maintain our emotional connection while we are physically apart. It's just another way to show affection and keep the connection strong.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	Yes, we use an app designed for couples that asks daily questions to help us learn more about each other. When it comes to Instagram, we also watch TV series together and discuss it over Instagram messages.
Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	Yes, we do follow each other's friends on social media after meeting them in real life.
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family	No, I don't feel more comfortable because most of the friends I follow don't post much, so it doesn't really affect our interactions.

because you are also connected with them online?	
In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	It allows us to share daily moments, plan future activities, and keep the relationship dynamic by exchanging content that reflects our shared interests and future plans
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	The ability to send quick messages throughout the day helps us feel more connected and makes the distance less overwhelming

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Yes, I've felt jealous in the past, especially when seeing my partner's Instagram stories with certain friends. It's something that I've had to work through.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	We haven't set any specific rules about this, and I don't really care if my partner follows people from her past. I trust her.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	No, we haven't established any specific rules regarding social media usage.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Yes, there have been times when my partner seemed distracted during our video calls. It bothers both of us, so we try to avoid it and stay focused on each other when we're communicating. Sometimes when we are together, she uses her phone extensively and scrolls Reels on Instagram, it makes me angry because I feel ignored.

Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Yes, we've had misunderstandings because of social media. Often, we assume the other person understands what we're going through, but communication isn't always clear online, which can lead to conflicts.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	Sometimes, instead of focusing on meaningful communication, one can get caught up in mindlessly scrolling through feeds or paying more attention to social media than the partner.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA	
How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	I think that Instagram or Facebook have a mixed impact on our relationship satisfaction. On one hand, they help us stay in touch and share our lives with each other, which is satisfying. However, they also come with the risk of causing misunderstandings or jealousy, which can negatively affect our satisfaction.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	I think it would negatively influence our relationship if social media didn't exist. Being able to see what my partner is doing and share moments with her, even when we're apart, is important to me.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	One feature that could be beneficial is a shared calendar or event planning tool within the app. This could help us coordinate visits or plan activities more seamlessly, integrating with our social media interactions and making it easier to keep track of our plans together.

12. Interview XII: Participant 21

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Almost 3 years.

What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	I live in Poland, and he lives in Belem, Brazil.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We try to visit each other 3 times a year; however, when we are together, we spend a full month together, so usually, we spend 3 months of each year together. We take turns flying to each other, once me, once him.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met online on Tinder during my boyfriend's vacation in Europe. After chatting for a while, we went on a few dates and fell in love, so we decided to start a long-distance relationship.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Work definitely comes first, but also family and friends. We are currently trying to reach a compromise and are looking for a place roughly in the middle of our countries so that it is convenient for both sides.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	I think it's the longing. We are at an age where I can call our relationship mature. I often wish he was here beside me, supporting me in difficult situations related to work or life, but we are left with only online communication.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, we mainly use Facebook, but sometimes also WhatsApp for quick conversations and Instagram for sharing content. But we are definitely not TikTok generation.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	On Facebook, we use video chat, send text and voice messages, and on Instagram, we share content.

What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	We share a lot of things, from photos and videos showing what we're currently doing to interesting articles from online newspapers. We also often send each other existing posts, like when someone from our friends gets engaged or interesting events from the lives of our close ones.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, Instagram mainly serves that purpose for us. I think it's easy to access funny content there; we mainly use this platform to share humour. It's not very important to us, but it does help improve our mood when the days are tougher.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	It's hard to pinpoint a typical day since there is a significant time difference between us. Often, when I wake up, it's 3 a.m. for my boyfriend. I usually wait for him to wake up—he lets me know via a Facebook message—and then each day is different depending on our obligations. We do have a rule to video call each other at least once every two days.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Usually, it's a smartphone when we are away from home, but often, in the evening when I'm in bed with my laptop, I use it for primary communication.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	I hadn't thought about it before, but I think it does. When I see that he's active, I feel like he's present and that he could reply at any moment. It also helps me keep track of the time difference. I often get tired of calculating the time difference. By looking at Facebook, I can see, for example, that he's online at that moment, which means, to put it simply, he's not asleep.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and	To some extent, yes. What else could bridge that gap if not online communication, which mainly happens

<p>create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>on social media? It might not be a perfect solution, but it's definitely better than old-school calls and messaging.</p>
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>For me, it was when he posted photos on Facebook from my visit, which included me, his mom, and his sister. The post received a lot of positive comments from his friends and showed me for the first time on his social media. I felt like I stopped being the "mystery girl from Europe," who sounded almost like a legend, to his friends.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, definitely. I think that adults living together create their comfort zone through shared space, planning their lives, moves, and vacations together. For us, all these discussions happen online, so it's definitely one big IT cloud of our relationship.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, very often before the arrival of the other half, we exchange posts about places we want to take each other when we visit.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Definitely not. We just value spending time together, not showing off.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	Definitely, as words are emotions, and we express them through platforms like Facebook. In addition, there are lots of photos and heart emojis.
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	Yes, for instance, I might send my boyfriend a photo, and he'll reply with an elaborate message about how beautiful his girlfriend is. I think these interactions significantly help maintain our relationship.
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	Yes, we're not afraid to show others that we're together and that we're happy. It also reassures me to some extent that other people know he's taken, which reduces the number of people potentially interested in him in an intimate way.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	Definitely offline—whether it's an argument or expressing love, nothing compares to expressing emotions face-to-face.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	Yes, for both of us sex is an integral aspect of a relationship. Sometimes we manage to video call each other, and sometimes we do it through messages. I think sexting, in particular, shows the partner that “it's worth waiting” for the next reunion.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Sometimes, distant partners engage in joint activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	Unfortunately, no. Of course, sometimes during our conversations we comment on activities we're currently doing, but I would rather call it multitasking than intentional planning of events.
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Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	Definitely! The distance between us is so vast that it's the only way to stay up-to-date with each other's friends and have some idea of what's going on with them.
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?	Yes, I definitely think so. I can't imagine not having any contact with them while I'm in Europe and suddenly showing up every 4 months without knowing what has been happening. It definitely provides comfort and more topics for conversation.
In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	It's hard to choose one specific advantage, but I think it's the fact that we can stay continuously connected, send photos, call each other, or record voice messages, and it all happens in one place.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Yes, it provides continuity and ongoing conversation, creating the feeling that someone is indeed on the other side.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	It happened quite often during the first year of our relationship. I was then still distrustful and uncertain. However, I think it's a mix of both social media and cultural differences. I felt there was a huge gap between interactions with friends in Poland—where everyone keeps their distance—and in Brazil—where hugging in photos with friends, etc., is normal. But now we trust each other, and it's no longer an issue.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Yes, we both met after we were in our thirties and had more or less significant past relationships. We don't have a problem with following people from our past as long as certain boundaries are not crossed.

<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>We never sat down and defined typical rules, but I feel that we both have a healthy sense of judgment and know how far we can go. Of course, I wouldn't accept my boyfriend using OnlyFans or flirting with other girls online, but I don't mind if he likes a friend's photo or writes a nice comment. It's totally normal for us because, as I mentioned, we base our relationship on trust.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>No, usually when we're together, we make the most of it unless one of us has, for example, an important work project and is receiving endless messages on Teams. But we also understand that there are such moments and work is work, so it needs to be respected.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Of course, there have been minor disagreements due to misinterpreted messages, but they are usually resolved in no time.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>I think it's not about using social media but about trust in your partner and in yourself. I believe that if a couple does not trust each other, their relationship can fall apart due to social media or any other small element. In our case, the trust is strong enough that I don't think there is a way social media could hurt us.</p>

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Social media definitely has a positive impact on our relationship. There are so many functions through which we can express ourselves. Additionally, I can't imagine what an alternative would be. Maybe if we lived together in the same city, social media wouldn't be as significant, but in our case, it's definitely a major support for our relationship.</p>
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Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	Negatively, I can't imagine not using social media to maintain a good relationship with my partner.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	I'm not sure exactly, but perhaps a morning notification like "Your partner is up and active" might help relationships with a significant time difference.

13. Interview XIII: Participant 22

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Participant 24: Since the beginning of 2022, so around 2.5 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	Participant 24: I live in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and my girlfriend lives in Prague, Czech Republic. Long-distance relationship is tough for us. During the first six months of our relationship, we lived in the same city and immediately felt it was something serious. Unfortunately, now that we're apart, it's definitely not the same. We have to dedicate much more, both financially and time-wise, as well as emotionally.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We don't have a set rule for regular visits; it all depends on work or finances. On average, we manage to see each other about once a month, usually for a weekend. There are months when we see each other even twice, but sometimes it's not possible, and we might only meet once every two months. However, we have a clear rule for holidays, birthdays, and major

	events – we always spend those together.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We have met face-to-face, in Amsterdam.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	The main reason is work from both sides. At first, my girlfriend was finishing her studies and was on Erasmus in Amsterdam when we met. Later, she got a job in her own country, and I have a stable job in mine, so this is the main reason why we are in a long-distance relationship.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	The main issue in our relationship is definitely longing, especially those moments when you just want to hug or do something together, but you can't because of the distance. On the other hand, it has taught me to appreciate the little moments when we are together in the same place. I cherish every shared movie night, cooking together, or even just sitting in silence.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, the main channels of communication are Facebook and WhatsApp, but we also frequently use Instagram to share content with each other.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	On Facebook, we mainly use the chat feature where we send each other voice and text messages, and we also conduct video calls there. On Instagram, we primarily use private messaging to share various types of content from other accounts.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	On Facebook, we only share private things like messages, photos, content created by us. On Instagram, we share a variety of content such as reels, profiles of various companies we're interested in, places we want to visit, and also humorous content.

<p>Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?</p>	<p>Yes, we send each other a lot of memes and funny reels. I love my girlfriend's sense of humour, and sending such content has become a daily habit for us. It's very important because we understand each other perfectly when it comes to humour. Sometimes we're in the mood for dark humour and send each other memes that we know would be inappropriate or unacceptable to others, but we don't judge each other in this regard, and that's very important in our relationship.</p>
<p>Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.</p>	<p>Basically, we communicate almost non-stop. As soon as I wake up and make coffee, we immediately start interacting. We have very similar lifestyles, the same work dimension, etc., so we are surrounded by social media all day long. We talk about and, to be honest, write about every little thing that happens during the day.</p>
<p>What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)</p>	<p>Mostly smartphone, but sometimes my girlfriend uses Facebook chat while she is in the office and she opens the chat on laptop. It's easier for her, so she can work and chat with me simultaneously.</p>

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

<p>Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?</p>	<p>Absolutely, when I see that my girlfriend is active online, it encourages me to send her a message. Sometimes in these messages, I don't necessarily describe a specific event; I might just ask her "what's up?" or "how are you feeling?" I also send her nice messages just to make her feel cheerful. Additionally, despite the distance, I feel like she is accessible and present when I see her online. It's hard to explain, but that's definitely the impression I have.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and</p>	<p>Definitely, no matter how you look at it, we don't have many other options in our relationship. Interactions on social</p>

<p>create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>media give us the ability to see each other on video chat, listen to messages and hear each other's voices, share photos of what we're currently doing, or write about what we're thinking. It may not be the ideal form of interaction, but it's definitely the best among all the possibilities available to us.</p>
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Certainly, the moments when we call each other on video chat on Facebook are special. I can not only hear my girlfriend's voice but also see her, which gives me the impression of almost being with her. I feel exceptionally connected to her during those times, yet it also intensifies the longing because as soon as I see her on video chat, I wish even more to see her in person.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>I think cyberspace is our shared space. For other couples, these spaces are physical, like a house or an apartment, but our interactions are primarily based on the internet, apps, and chats. Everything that connects us is discussed there, even plans for a physical shared space. We often talk online about moving in together, our future plans, etc., but generally, I feel like the boundaries in our relationship between what is online and what is face-to-face are blurred. We value the face-to-face moments more, but there are definitely more online interactions. Therefore, cyberspace is definitely our space during the distance.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social</p>	<p>Very often, both my girlfriend and I live in quite well-known European capitals where a lot is happening, from music events to new restaurant openings. We usually browse Instagram to check what's happening on the specific weekends when we visit each other. Also, before planning vacations, we often check reels on Instagram to see the views and photos</p>

media influenced your face-to-face plans?	of certain places to decide whether it's worth visiting or not.
Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?	At the beginning of our relationship, I often did that. I felt so in love that I wanted to show the whole world every moment spent with my girlfriend. Sometimes I had this feeling that for example I wanted to take my girlfriend to a fancy restaurant and already before going there I knew that I will share it on my social media. Over time, I don't do it as much. We definitely do what we feel like doing, and social media doesn't motivate me in any way to make offline plans, but at the beginning, it was a strong motivation.

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	Yes. I believe it's definitely not as good as in face-to-face conversations, but there's certainly the possibility to express emotions through text messages, video chats, and even by sharing meaningful content or photos.
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	Yes, definitely in a better way than traditional phone calls or texts, I think features like sending photos, video chats, sending emojis, or even sending memes directed at my girlfriend can build such intimacy. There is a wide range of tools that we can use to maintain it.
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	Yes, we often post photos together. It's hard for me to say what the main reason is, but I think we simply want to show others that we are together and happy. I also think it's a way to set boundaries for others—if any interested girl were to visit my profile, she would immediately see that I am taken. The same goes for my girlfriend. I believe we're not inviting unwanted attention this way and we limit the possibility of flirting with others, as everyone can see openly that we are together. We also marked on

	our Facebook profiles that we are together. It is nice to receive comments from our friends how happy they are for us under the status update.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	I think it depends on which emotions we're talking about. When it comes to positive emotions, like saying 'I love you' or 'I care about you,' it's definitely more pleasant and easier face to face. However, I feel that during arguments, I prefer it to happen online. Face to face, it's often easy to impulsively say things you later regret. When we argue over chat, each of us has a moment to think about our responses, delete messages, and write a new, better one. It also gives us a chance to calm down and process the issue rationally.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	We do engage in it. I think sexting is quite natural for people in long-distance relationships. After all, 'normal' couples have many more moments of closeness and physical intimacy, which we don't have, so we have to replace it with something. We often send each other photos or messages that excite us. It's not comparable to the intimacy when we are together in one place, but to some extent, it fills that gap.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	Definitely! Sometimes when we both have a free evening, we organize home dates. We often use the video chat feature on Facebook for that. I cook beforehand, my girlfriend also prepares something, and then we can share dinner over the camera, have a glass of wine, discuss, laugh together—it's a great way to connect.
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<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>I agree with that. We mutually follow our close friends or even families on social media. I have to say, typically on Instagram, we follow our friends, whereas on Facebook, mostly family members. I'm not sure why there's such a division, but it's probably due to generational differences. Most of our friends are on Instagram, while parents or grandparents prefer Facebook. But getting back to your question, yes, we share common circles of friends online.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Yes, I definitely feel more comfortable. I maintain regular contact with my girlfriend's friends and family on social media—we like each other's photos, follow each other's profiles, and I see what's happening in their lives every day. We also have the opportunity to exchange a few words or even plan surprise birthday parties for my girlfriend together, or coordinate our holiday trips. Social media has definitely helped me have a better and more open relationship with them, especially since we don't have many opportunities to meet face to face</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>The fact that we can communicate whenever we want and from any place in the world. We are just in constant online contact. Even without planning conversations, we send each other small messages throughout the day. That's why I feel like we're always up-to-date with each other's lives.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Yes, that's important. I can use private chat with my girlfriend and message her whenever she's available. In a sense, I feel like the conversation continues in real-time despite breaks. Additionally, I usually see if she's read the message, when she was last active, which gives me a rough idea of what she might be doing during the day and whether she's busy or not.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>I have never directly been jealous of something my girlfriend did, but sometimes I felt jealous when other men messaged her on Instagram or Facebook and liked many of her photos. She always ignored them and never paid much attention to it, but of course, such behaviour from men aroused jealousy in me.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>We have no issue with following our ex-partners on social media. For example, one of my girlfriend's ex-boyfriends is a very close friend of hers. I know there are no romantic feelings between them, and I have no problem with it. Of course, I would feel uncomfortable knowing that she constantly follows them, writes a lot, and likes their photos, but such situations rarely happen, and I trust her in this regard. I also follow some of my ex-girlfriends, except for one who was very pushy and kept bothering me.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>We don't have specific rules that we established at a particular moment. I think it comes more intuitively. We know our own boundaries and what might upset the other person. So, I can say that such rules exist, but they stem from the fact that we care for each other rather than being explicitly discussed.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>I feel that when we do see each other rarely, we try to make the most of those meetings. We try not to spend too much time on the phone because, in my eyes, it is a waste of time when we could be talking instead. Of course, there are minimal moments when my girlfriend is on her phone, and it annoys me because she is not focusing on me, but usually, one request is enough for her to stop doing it.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your</p>	<p>There have been small misunderstandings that we quickly resolved. I think most of them happened when we communicated through messages on chat. It's hard to</p>

partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	read emotions and tone from messages, so a few times, for example, I had the impression that my girlfriend was angry about something when she wasn't. In such situations, we usually call each other on video or send a voice message to resolve this type of conflict.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	I think that long-distance relationships are so fragile that almost anything can harm them. Social media can, of course, be one of those things, although I believe it's not so much about the apps themselves but mainly about the people who use them.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	Absolutely, both platforms positively support the satisfaction of our relationship. Currently, we don't have the option to live in the same city or even the same country, and social media allows us to continuously maintain our relationship.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	It would definitely have a negative impact on our relationship. I think social media offers so many different communication tools and visual options that they could never be replaced by a regular phone call, or simple text message.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Nothing comes into my mind.

14. Interview XIV: Participant 23

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	We've been in a relationship for around two and a half years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	It is between Portugal and Brazil. There's about 7,000 kilometers between us, which is a challenge, but it also makes our relationship unique.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We manage to see each other about three to four times a year. These visits require a lot of planning, both financially and in terms of time off from work.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met online through a mutual friend on Facebook, and it took about a year before we finally met in person.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	The main reason is practical — I have a stable job in Portugal, while my partner is finishing studies in Brazil. We both have commitments that tie us to our countries for now.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	The hardest part is not being there for the small, everyday moments. When something great or challenging happens, we can't immediately hug or celebrate together, and sometimes the time zone difference means waiting hours for a response.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	We communicate every day using WhatsApp for quick messages and calls, and we use Instagram and Facebook to share photos, memes, and videos.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	We use Instagram Stories to share moments from our daily lives, and direct messages for private jokes and flirting. On Facebook, we use Messenger for longer conversations or when planning future visits.

What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	We share everything from pictures of our meals to scenic views, memes that remind us of each other.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, we exchange memes a lot! Humour is a big part of our connection, and memes help us feel like we are sharing a laugh together, even when we are apart.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	We start with a "Good morning" text on WhatsApp, then share funny or interesting posts throughout the day on Instagram. By evening, we usually have a video call or a longer chat via Facebook Messenger.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	We mostly use our smartphones. It's the most convenient way for both of us to stay connected wherever we are.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Absolutely. It's comforting to see him active, liking posts, or sharing stories. It makes me feel like he is just a click away,
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Yes, social media can create a sense of presence and shared space. It's not the same as being physically together, but it helps us feel connected.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	Once, I shared an Instagram story about something stressful at work, and my partner quickly responded with a video call, which turned into a mini "date night" that made me feel incredibly supported.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any	Yes! Cyberspace is like our virtual living room — a place where we can hang out, share our thoughts.

<p>remarks on the concept of cyberspace?</p> <p>Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, we've planned trips to certain restaurants and even a vacation spot after seeing them on Instagram. It helps us visualize our future adventures together.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Knowing that we can capture and share our experiences on social media adds an extra layer of excitement to our plans. It's not about showing off; it's about creating memories that we can look back on together.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Definitely. Through stories, posts, and private messages, I can share what I'm feeling in creative ways that are unique to our relationship.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, by allowing us to see each other's daily lives and share in those experiences, they help maintain a sense of closeness.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Yes, I share photos of us together on Instagram and my relationship status on Facebook. The main reason is to celebrate our relationship and show that love can thrive even across continents. But there is also a deeper meaning behind it — being in a homosexual relationship, I feel proud to openly share who I love and who I</p>

	am, without fear. It's about visibility and breaking down stereotypes, letting others know that our love is just as valid and beautiful as any other.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	It depends on the situation. Online, it's sometimes easier to express deeper emotions or share thoughts that might be harder to say face-to-face, especially when there's time to think and choose the right words. However, offline expressions, like a hug or holding hands, convey emotions in ways that words can't fully capture.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	Yes, we do engage in sexting occasionally on private chats. I feel that it keeps the spark alive. It also helps to express our desires and affection for one another in a playful way.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	Not really, we do not do such things.
Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	Definitely, we always add each other friends on social media, after we have a chance to meet them face-to-face.
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?	Yes, I would say so. I mean mostly because I can get to know them through their profiles. It gives me some idea what they might like or do in their lives, so surely the conversations go smooth.

In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	Probably constant connection and all of the variations of content that we can exchange.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Yes, of course. It allows for immediate connection, especially when we need a quick chat.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	Yes, I have experienced jealousy at times, especially because Brazil has such a sexually expressive culture. When I see my partner engaging with others online, particularly people who are very open and flirtatious, it can stir up feelings of insecurity. But these moments also lead to important conversations about trust and boundaries, which help us grow stronger as a couple.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	No, we decided to stop following our ex-partners, just for the sake of avoiding the risks of unpleasant situations.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	Yes, we have set some boundaries to help maintain trust. For instance, we've agreed to be open about our interactions with others, especially with people we know might be a source of jealousy.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Yes, it happened in the past that I've felt my partner was more engaged with his phone than with me, especially during our video calls. It can feel frustrating and make me feel like I'm competing for their attention.
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your	Yes, misunderstandings have happened. Sometimes, it's a matter of misinterpreting a comment or a "like"

partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	on a post, or even a perceived lack of attention when one of us doesn't reply right away.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	Yes, I think that social media can potentially harm long-distance relationships. It can easily create misunderstandings or jealousy when you can't be there to witness things firsthand.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA	
How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	Instagram and Facebook have a significant impact on our relationship satisfaction. They help us feel connected by allowing us to share daily moments, express affection, and engage with each other in creative ways. However, they can also introduce moments of jealousy or insecurity due to misunderstandings or seeing interactions that trigger doubts.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	If social media did not exist, I think it would negatively influence our relationship, especially given the long distance. Social media platforms are essential tools for us to share our lives in real time, keep the spark alive, and feel like we are a part of each other's daily routines. Without them, we would have to rely solely on phone calls or texts, which wouldn't offer the same level of engagement or sense of presence.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Maybe a "shared timeline" or "joint account" option where both partners can contribute content that appears on a combined feed. For now, only Instagram allows to collaborate while posting, but something more than that would be nice

15. Interview XV: Participant 24

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	Around 2.5 years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	It is between South Africa and Poland.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Unfortunately, only 3 to 4 times a years, but we are planning to change it.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met on a dating app while we were both on a student exchange program in Spain. I think it was Bumble. After some time of texting, we started meeting in person, and later continued our relationship after returning to our home countries.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	At first, it was definitely because of school; after the exchange, we had to finish our university degrees in our respective countries. Now we're almost done with our studies, but we are still young and attached to our families and close friends, plus we don't have the money to move to another country.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	I think it's communication. Of course, there's a lot of missing each other too, but I feel like the way we communicate doesn't meet all our expectations, and often there's miscommunication because our relationship relies heavily on messaging.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, social media is the main channel of our communication. We use WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.

How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	I think we use almost everything. If I want to communicate something quickly and I'm too lazy to type, I'll record a voice message. We also do video calls on Instagram, share various posts, and we send a lot of messages on Facebook Messenger.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	Mostly lots of messages, memes, photos, short videos, Reels—everything.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, a lot of memes. We love dark internet humour. I also love to annoy my girlfriend by sending her all the memes that mock Slavic culture or Polish people. Of course, she doesn't take it seriously and laughs along. It's important for us because we love to laugh and have a good time together in person, and now, in some way, memes replace that humour.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	We send each other something from morning until evening. Sometimes it's a morning meme, sometimes a message. We often text continuously throughout the day and try to video call at least three times a week.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Iphones.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Not really, I don't feel that way at all.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	I think so. It's not the same as physically being next to each other, but in the end, we don't have many choices, so social media definitely helps to blur the feeling of distance to some extent.

<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>Nothing specific comes to mind.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as ‘being together’, yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Definitely, cyberspace is our shared space. Lots of conversations, photos, and content exchanges. Most of our conversations are online, and they are largely the foundation of our relationship now. For example, I often go through the archives of our conversations and look at the photos we sent each other in the past. I know I can find everything we've shared there so far.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, we usually look up restaurants and cafes on Instagram, and sometimes music festivals too. Based on the photos, we often choose such places and then visit them.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>I think so. In general, I like to share my life on Facebook and Instagram; I often share moments from my life. It may not be the main motivation, but I often feel like I should take photos during events and so on to show them off later.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, we often send each other heart or hugging emojis. It's nice to receive such messages. And of course, all the messages we share... we often express emotions in them.</p>
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<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>I think so. We confide in each other about everything on Facebook Messenger, and it certainly enhances our emotional intimacy. We know that the other person will reply as soon as they see the message, and it builds our emotional bond.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>I haven't marked my relationship status on Facebook, but honestly, I haven't updated my profile in a long time. I can honestly say I don't really care much about how my Facebook profile looks, so I never even thought about updating my relationship status. As for Instagram, I freely post pictures of me and my girlfriend; I don't hide that we're together and openly share it with my followers.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>It probably depends on the situation and the emotions we want to express. I often prefer to 'argue' over messages. It gives me time to think about my behaviour and to phrase my messages properly. I know from experience in my previous relationship that negative emotions expressed face-to-face are often unconsidered. When it comes to showing positive emotions, like saying "I love you," etc., I definitely prefer to express them in person. It may not be easier, but it's certainly more meaningful.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, we do send each other photos or messages of that kind from time to time. I have to admit it usually starts from my girlfriend. We don't have many opportunities to see each other in person, so it gives us a sense that physical intimacy is still present between us.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner</p>	<p>Not really, we don't usually organize such activities.</p>
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<p>together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat.</p> <p>With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Absolutely. I think at our age, it's natural—you meet someone, and you automatically add them on Facebook or Instagram, or they add you.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Yes, I feel more comfortable. Based on their social media profiles, I can see more or less what they're interested in daily, so it makes face-to-face conversations easier for me.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>It's hard to pinpoint one, but I think it's the diversity of communication. We can send photos and videos, either in chat or ones that disappear after a second. We share content that interests us or even products we like, and I ask my girlfriend for her opinion before I buy them. It kind of replaces the general conversations we would have if we lived in the same house.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>I don't think so, I've never really thought about it. Of course, it makes communication easier, but it's not the main advantage of social media in my eyes.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>No, I trust my girlfriend, and we haven't had any unpleasant situations like that. Luckily, not yet...</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram?</p>	<p>Some ex-partners, yes, especially those we were with years ago, and it's clear that only friendship connects us now. However, I have one person from the past that I blocked because she wouldn't leave me alone when I was already in a relationship with my current girlfriend.</p>

<p>If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Yes, definitely regarding phone usage (including social media) when we spend time together. We noticed that we used to lie in bed next to each other in the morning and mindlessly scroll through Instagram Reels. Often, one of us would get annoyed due to a lack of attention, so we decided to limit such purposeless social media browsing.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?</p>	<p>Yes, it did happen, which is why we set specific rules to limit our use of social media.</p>
<p>Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?</p>	<p>Yes, it often happened that we misread the tone of messages, which led to conflicts. Personally, I would often write to my girlfriend about something that excited me, like passing an exam at university, and I would receive a response that didn't satisfy me, which made me feel upset. But after a video call or even a voice message, such minor conflicts usually get resolved.</p>
<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>It probably depends on the person using them. Any online activity, if not thoughtful, can hurt the relationship.</p>

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Definitely a positive! I can see my girlfriend whenever I want, exchange photos with her, and create a profile where she also appears. I think it's a nice exposure for the relationship, and our relationship gains respect from others when we communicate it openly.</p>
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Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	It would definitely have a negative impact; I can't even imagine such a situation.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Hard to say, I have no idea.

16. Interview XVI: Participant 25

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	At this point, we've been together for almost two years.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	I live in England, and my partner lives in Belgium. It's definitely quite difficult; we don't have the same opportunities as couples who live together.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We usually see each other face-to-face once a month. We fly to each other or often meet halfway or choose a holiday destination to explore together.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met face-to-face while traveling and spent two weeks together. After that, we continued our relationship mostly online.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	Right now, it's mainly work and our master's degrees. We both work in the countries we live in, and I'm doing my master's online, while my partner is doing it in person, in Brussels.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	I think it's the longing and sometimes the communication. It's hard to find the time to maintain a long-distance relationship while having a busy life.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, definitely, we communicate every day through social media. We frequently use Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp for calls.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	I think we use almost all the features. We use instant messaging, send voice messages, make video calls on Facebook, and use other features like photos which disappear after few seconds.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	We often send each other various photos, disappearing images, voice messages, and share content like posts, links to articles or Reels that interest us.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, we do. I think humour is a big part of our relationship; sending memes helps us stay connected. We both love to joke, so it is a nice way to express our humour when we are separated by distance.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	It's hard to describe exactly, but usually, we start the day with a message, and we stay in touch throughout the day, sending different things back and forth depending on our schedules.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	Definitely a smartphone. We both use apps on our smartphones for communication.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE	
Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Yes, it does. Even seeing the green dot next to her name makes me feel like if I send a message, I'll get a reply right away. It helps maintain the feeling of constant connection.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and	Yes, because it offers more diverse ways to communicate than just texting or calling, like sending pictures,

<p>create the feeling of being next to one another?</p>	<p>emojis, or GIFs, which makes the communication feel richer.</p>
<p>Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?</p>	<p>There are many moments, like when I'm feeling down and she sends me something to cheer me up, like a short video clip or a funny reel. These small gestures make me feel closer to her.</p>
<p>Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, definitely. I see our online interactions as our shared space since we can't share a physical space right now, like a home or workplace.</p>
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, this happens very often. We both love to travel, and we don't really trust websites like TripAdvisor or typical travel guides anymore because it seems like a lot of tourists use them, and we can't find more local spots that way. So, as we call it, before every trip, we do our research mainly on Instagram. We look at different restaurants, places, and can immediately judge from the photos whether the food looks good or if a museum is interesting from the inside. I have to admit that most of our trips are planned based on social media content we see.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Yes, I think I am the kind of person who, not necessarily likes to show off, but all my friends see me as someone who has an interesting life, travels a lot, and is very active. So, I do enjoy sharing these experiences on social media. I wouldn't say it's a priority — it's not like I do things just so I can post them on social media. But usually, when we do something together or visit a new place or restaurant, I do end up sharing it on social media, either as a</p>

	post on Facebook or as a story on Instagram.
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SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY	
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Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?	Yes, I think so. Although it's not the same as expressing emotions face-to-face, video calls or voice messages help convey emotions more personally.
Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?	Yes, I agree. Social media makes it easier to maintain emotional intimacy by allowing us to share little moments and express affection.
Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?	Yes, both my partner and I have our relationship status displayed on Facebook, and we don't mind posting pictures together on Instagram. It's our way of setting boundaries and showing we're committed.
Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?	It's definitely easier to express emotions offline because you can physically be there for each other. I find it hard to explain more complex emotions online since my partner isn't there to fully understand what I'm feeling.
Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?	Yes, we often engage in sexting to maintain attraction and build tension before seeing each other. It adds excitement to our relationship and enhances our sexual life when we meet.

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA	
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Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat.	Yes, quite often. For example, we have virtual dinners on video calls for special occasions like birthdays or Valentine's Day when we can't be together.
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With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?	
Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?	We try to add each other's friends on social media to build connections, which is the best option we have for maintaining relationships with each other's friends.
Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?	Yes, definitely. It helps break down barriers and makes me feel more comfortable around them.
In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?	I think the main opportunities offered by social media are the ability to stay constantly connected and share our lives in a more visual and interactive way. We can send each other photos, videos, and content that we find interesting or funny, which keeps our relationship dynamic and engaging.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Yes, I find instant messaging very important for our relationship. It helps us maintain a continuous flow of communication throughout the day.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	I haven't been jealous, but my partner was when my ex started messaging me and liking all my photos. My girlfriend asked me to block her to set boundaries.
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Yes, there are a few specific people we have agreed not to follow due to past situations that caused discomfort or conflict. It's not a general rule, but there are a couple of profiles that we've both decided to avoid because of past that might still carry some baggage.

Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	We haven't set strict rules, but we trust each other and know what's acceptable. I wouldn't be okay with her flirting online, but liking or commenting on friends' posts is fine.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Sometimes I felt ignored when she was busy with replying to friends on social media, but usually I just tell her what I think about it and she stops.
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Not really.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	I think social media itself isn't the problem; it's more about trust. If there's no trust, any small thing, even social media, can harm a relationship.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	They help fill the gap in our relationship by allowing us to create a shared social network and feel like we're building something together.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	It would definitely have a negative impact. I can't imagine how our communication would work without the diversity of interactions social media provides.
Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?	Honestly, I think they already have so many features that it's hard to think of anything they're missing.

17. Interview XVII: Participant 26

SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	
How long have you and your partner been in a relationship?	We've been in a relationship for a year now. It's still relatively new, but things are going well.
What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?	I live in Cracow, Poland, and my girlfriend lives in Bratislava. It is around 6h drive by Flixbus. I think that it is challenging but manageable compared to longer distances.
How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	We see each other every month, even for a weekend. We try to plan our visits around our work and school schedules so we can spend as much time together as possible.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	Face-to-face.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	It is university and work, we are both working students, but mainly I would say university. This is our biggest commitment at the moment.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	For me the biggest struggle is missing another person. Sometimes I just want to hug or watch a movie together, but we can't because of the distance.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE	
Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	I use social media with my partner about three to four times a day, but the conversations are long, so we spend a lot of time communicating via social media throughout the day.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	We mainly use WhatsApp for video calls and messaging on Facebook and Instagram.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	We share personal updates, funny memes, and sometimes content that helps us plan our visits.

Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, we exchange memes and funny content a lot. It keeps our relationship fun, and it's a great way to show affection indirectly, especially when memes are reflecting certain situation from our lives.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	Usually, we text in the morning and during lunch, and then we have a video call at the end of the day to catch up. Often when I can't fell asleep, I'm exchanging some Reels or content in general with my girlfriend.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	I use my smartphone. It's just the most convenient for texts, calls, and video chats.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE

Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Yes, it does. Seeing my girlfirmed online makes me feel like she is available to talk, and it reduces the anxiety of waiting for a response.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Yes, especially with video calls. It feels like we're together because I can see and hear her, which makes a big difference.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	When we have deep conversations or share meaningful content online, such as memes directed at specific situations.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any remarks on the concept of cyberspace?	Yes, definitely. Our online interactions feel like our own private space.

<p>Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, we have! For example, I kept showing my partner photos and videos from the profile of a music festival in Poland that I found on Instagram. The festival looked amazing, with great line-up. After seeing all the content and getting excited about it, we decided to plan a trip there. It ended up being a fantastic experience — we loved the music, the energy, and just being able to share that time together. Social media definitely played a big role in inspiring that trip.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>For me, sharing our activities on social media doesn't really add motivation. I'm not someone who posts a lot online. However, it is important to my girlfriend. She enjoys sharing memories and moments from our time together, like posting photos and stories on Instagram and Facebook. I know it means a lot to her to document our experiences, and I love that it makes her happy.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, we express ourselves a lot through sharing memes, videos, and messages. It's a nice way to show how we feel in different ways.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Absolutely. They help us stay connected by sharing daily life moments and just being in each other's lives more.</p>
<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>No, I'm pretty private about my relationship. I rarely post photos or updates about us on social media.</p>

<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>It depends. I find it easier to express positive emotions face-to-face, but sometimes it's easier to communicate negative emotions online because it gives me time to think twice before I go too far.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Yes. At first, I was uncomfortable with it, but over time, as we communicated about what felt comfortable, it helped keep the connection alive, especially since we lack physical contact. Another thing is that I am very visual, but my memory is horrible, sometimes I have a feeling that I don't remember the body of girlfriend, but she keeps me posted with some photos and immediately the memory comes back.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in join activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>Sometimes, not very often, but we like to comment in real-life something that we watch. We do this sometimes over Facebook or Instagram chat, it can be TV series, or some sport events, such as tennis games.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, we do share some friends, especially people we've met through each other, but our main friend groups are still separate.</p>
<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Yes, being connected online makes me feel more familiar with them, which helps me feel more comfortable when we meet in person.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>I think that the fact that social media is very visual, if I am in a mood for certain food, I can just send her a photo from some post or Reels. Or sometimes when I am going to a party or festival, my girlfriend asks for the event, so I</p>

	can just send her a profile of the event and she has in her mind how it looks like.
Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?	Yes, surely to some extent.

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?	No, I haven't felt jealous. We're both pretty comfortable and trust each other a lot when it comes to social media interactions
Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?	Yes, we follow our ex-partners on social media. We don't have any problem with that since we trust each other.
Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?	We don't have strict rules, but we do inform each other about any communication with past partners, just to be transparent.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	We try to do our best to avoid this type of situations, but sometimes we get distracted. I think that the worst is scrolling. When we are relaxing together in bed and we have nothing to do, it happens that both of us scroll Instagram, Facebook or TikTok feed. Usually, one of us gets bored and is annoyed at the other one still scrolling .
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	Yes, misunderstandings happen often through text because it's hard to interpret tone of the messages.

<p>Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, potentially. It can create misunderstandings or conflicts because it's easy to misinterpret the tone or intent behind messages. Also the issue distraction may be harmful, but I guess that as long as you use it not too extensively it rather has more advantages than disadvantages.</p>
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<p>SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA</p>	
<p>How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?</p>	<p>Overall, it's positive. Social media helps us stay connected.</p>
<p>Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?</p>	<p>I'm sure the quality of our relationship would drop without social media to keep us connected.</p>
<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>I think a feature that allows us to do more shared activities, like watching videos together in real-time, would be great.</p>

18. Interview XVIII: Participant 27

<p>SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS</p>	
<p>How long have you and your partner been in a long-distance relationship?</p>	<p>We have been in a long-distance relationship for about 2 years.</p>
<p>What is the approximate geographical distance between you and your partner, and how does this distance affect your relationship?</p>	<p>The distance is between Poland and New Zealand, so I have to mention that we couldn't be farther apart, but soon my partner plans to move to Europe.</p>

How frequently do you and your partner see each other in person, and how do you typically manage these visits?	Unfortunately, we can only visit each other about 3 times a year; the cost of plane tickets is overwhelming, and we can't afford to meet more often. We usually take turns flying, once he comes, and then I go.
Have you met online or facet-to-face?	We met online through the Bumble app; my partner was traveling in Greece at the time, and so was I. We matched and started chatting, and later managed to meet a few times.
Can you describe the main reasons for your current physical separation?	It's work and family commitments; he has his life there, and I have mine here in my country. Our relationship is still quite new, so it was hard to make the decision to drop everything and move to one country.
What is the biggest struggle that you encounter with your partner because of the distance?	Definitely the fact that I miss him unimaginably. Sometimes I think I would sacrifice a lot just for him to be next to me, but at the moment, that's not possible. Sometimes the longing breaks me emotionally.

SECTION 2: COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Do you communicate with your partner through social media and how often if it applies to you?	Yes, we communicate practically every day through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.
How do you and your partner use specific features of Instagram and Facebook (ex. instant messaging, video calls)?	We use WhatsApp for voice calls, and Instagram and Facebook for sending pictures and text messages. We also often make video calls via Facebook Messenger.
What type of content do you typically share with your partner on Instagram and/or Facebook?	I think everything, from pictures to sharing websites. Sometimes we share funny content and write about everything happening in real time.
Do you exchange with your partner humorous content such as memes and what it means for your relationship?	Yes, a lot. It is quite important for us because we have a similar sense of humor. When he sends me funny memes, I know they are directed only at me, and he wouldn't send the same to most people. Often, the memes we

	send refer to specific situations from our past or relate to our conversations.
Can you briefly describe a typical day of social media interactions with your partner? Include the frequency, timing, type of interactions.	With a 10-hour time difference, there's no such thing as a typical day; every day is a kind of freestyle. His waking up means it's 10 PM for me, and vice versa. As soon as one of us wakes up, we immediately send a message and try to video call at least once a day. Often, for him, it's summarizing the previous day, and for me, it's talking about what happened at the end of the day.
What is the main technological device that you use to communicate with your partner? (ex. laptop, smartphone)	For texting and sending photos, it's definitely the smartphone, but sometimes in the morning or evening when we have a video call, I prefer to call from my laptop simply because the screen is bigger.

SECTION 3: PERCEPTION OF CYBERSPACE AND PARTNER'S PRESENCE	
Does seeing your partner active on Facebook or/and Instagram influence your sense of closeness?	Not necessarily, I've never thought about it, so I guess it doesn't evoke any emotions in me.
Do you think that social media have the ability to bridge the gap of distance and create the feeling of being next to one another?	Not really, it certainly helps maintain the relationship, but it definitely doesn't eliminate the feeling of distance.
Can you describe any specific moment or interaction on Facebook and/or Instagram that made you feel particularly close or connected to your partner?	I think the moment we publicly posted our first photo together, we openly showed that we are together.
Being in a relationship is often referred to as 'being together', yet you and your partner spend most of the time apart. With this in mind, do you have any	Not really, my space with my partner is only shared when we are together. I'm not a big fan of technology, and I'd rather not have the idea that our relationship is based on some online concept.

<p>remarks on the concept of cyberspace? Would you say that it serves as a shared space for you and your partner?</p>	
<p>Have you and your partner ever planned real-life events, such as visiting places or restaurants, based on the attractive content seen on Facebook or/and Instagram? Could you describe a specific situation in which social media influenced your face-to-face plans?</p>	<p>Yes, we love nature and hiking, climbing, and kayaking. Often, through Instagram, we look at profiles that show new places worth visiting. On Facebook, we sometimes check such places later in terms of reviews — what other people think and whether it's worth going there.</p>
<p>Do you feel more motivated to participate in offline activities with your partner, knowing that you can share it on Facebook and/ or Instagram afterwards?</p>	<p>Definitely not; social media doesn't motivate me at all. The motivation simply comes from the desire to spend time with my boyfriend.</p>

SECTION 4: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND INTIMACY

<p>Do you think that the features of Instagram or/and Facebook allow you to express your emotions towards your partner? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Definitely, in a sense, yes. Often, outside of video calls, when one of us sends a message, we have to wait quite a while for a reply due to the time difference. Nevertheless, whenever I wake up, there's always something nice waiting for me, which instantly brightens my mood for the day. My boyfriend really makes an effort to maintain our relationship and sends me many emotional messages.</p>
<p>Do you think that Instagram or/and Facebook help you to maintain emotional intimacy within your relationship? If yes, how?</p>	<p>Yes, absolutely. We did have some major concerns about privacy at times and whether everything we write actually stays between us or not, but after a while, we decided that even if these messages were to come out somewhere, we wouldn't care. We openly talk about everything without any barriers, and that certainly keeps a sense of intimacy.</p>

<p>Do you share your relationship status or share photos depicting your partner on Facebook or/and Instagram? If yes, what is the main reason for that?</p>	<p>Yes, I think the main reason is that when I told my closest friends that my boyfriend is from New Zealand, everyone immediately assumed our relationship was doomed. I like posting photos with my boyfriend because I feel like, in a way, we are challenging stereotypes and showing others that we are happy despite the distance.</p>
<p>Would you say that expressing emotions is easier in online or offline environment? Why?</p>	<p>Definitely offline. Sometimes my boyfriend even accuses me of not being emotional enough, but I just can't express emotions through messages. I need to be next to the other person, hug them, or hold hands.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner engage in sexting on Facebook/Instagram private chats? If yes, does it play a role in your emotional connection with your partner?</p>	<p>Yes, we do sometimes. Definitely not as often as at the beginning of the relationship, but we still allow ourselves to engage in sexting from time to time. It helps us maintain a bond and shows us that it's worth waiting for each other and not looking at other people.</p>

SECTION 5: OPPORTUNITIES FACILITATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

<p>Sometimes, distant partners engage in joint activities online, such as organizing online dates, having dinner together on a video call, watching movie and commenting it on a chat. With this in mind, have you ever used Instagram and/or Facebook to engage with joint activities with your partner?</p>	<p>I wouldn't call it planning, but sometimes it happens that, for example, my boyfriend is preparing breakfast in the kitchen during a video chat, while I'm making a late dinner. We don't plan these situations; they happen naturally because we live apart, but in the same world, and we are constantly sharing different activities with each other through video or voice calls.</p>
<p>Do you think that Facebook or/and Instagram enable you to create shared networks of friends with your partner?</p>	<p>I agree; we add each other's mutual friends on Facebook and Instagram. I like to occasionally glance at their profiles. Sometimes, I also see from their photos or stories that my partner is with them doing something together. I wouldn't say I feel like I'm controlling him this way, but it's definitely nice to "keep an eye" on him.</p>

<p>Do you feel more comfortable among your partner's friends and family because you are also connected with them online?</p>	<p>Yes, definitely. I think it makes me a part of his life. After all, shared friend groups and their acceptance are important in any relationship. At the moment, we can only do this through social media, but it gives me a lot of comfort.</p>
<p>In your opinion, what are the main opportunities offered by social media for enhancing your relationship?</p>	<p>I think the ability to share content and especially send photos. Text messages or voice calls can be done over the phone, but the ease of content exchange, the lack of fees, and the availability are huge advantages.</p>
<p>Do you find instant messaging important for your relationship?</p>	<p>Not really; as I mentioned, the time difference is so significant that I usually have to wait a long time for a response anyway.</p>

SECTION 6: NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

<p>Have you ever experienced jealousy due to your partner's social media interactions?</p>	<p>Not me, but my partner does. At the beginning of our relationship, he was jealous, for example, when I was tagged in photos from a business trip. He would ask me about every man in the picture and what kind of relationship I had with them. But a quick conversation over the phone cleared up all the questions.</p>
<p>Do you or your partner follow or keep track of your ex-partners or individuals with whom you were emotionally involved in the past on Facebook/Instagram? If yes, have you or your partner ever felt uncomfortable knowing that? If yes, why?</p>	<p>Yes, we follow our ex-partners. Well, not all of them, because some I just don't feel like following, but that's my choice, and my partner doesn't impose it on me.</p>
<p>Do you and your partner set boundaries or rules regarding social media usage in your relationship? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>Not really anything specific. I always ask him to show me the photos before he posts them on his profile because I want to be sure I look good in them. But regarding following others or adding comments, we don't have any</p>

	rules like that because we generally rely on trust.
Have you ever felt that your partner was distracted by his/her phone or social media usage? How did it feel like?	Not really. When we are together, I feel like we try to step away from technology and make the most of the limited time we have together. We are at an age where it's easy to figure out what should be considered respectful behaviour, and getting distracted by phones or social media doesn't apply to us.
Have you ever felt that Instagram or/and Facebook usage by you or your partner has led to misunderstandings or conflicts in your relationship?	It has happened, maybe not to the point of conflict, but to a misunderstanding. Usually, these are small, silly situations. For example, when I tell my boyfriend I plan to stay at home in the evening, and then he sees on social media that I was out for wine with a friend. I then explain that it was a spontaneous decision and that I hadn't planned it. Besides, it's nice sometimes to see a bit of jealousy or that he more or less keeps an eye on what's happening with me. To me, that shows he cares about me.
Do you think that social media usage could potentially harm long-distance relationships? If yes, how?	I don't think in our case, but generally speaking, yes. It all depends on how couples use social media and whether they trust each other.

SECTION 7: GENERAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

How do you think Instagram and/or Facebook impact your relationship satisfaction?	I think social media increases our satisfaction in the relationship. Our communication is more varied, and it also allows us to publicly show that we are together, so in a way, it's an online proof that our relationship exists and is doing well.
Do you believe that if social media did not exist, it would positively or negatively influence the quality of your relationship?	Definitely negatively; I think our relationship wouldn't survive without social media. I can't even imagine how much it would cost me to use regular phone calls and messaging, not even mentioning sharing photos in private messages.

<p>Can you think of one feature of Instagram or Facebook that is currently missing but could facilitate communication with your partner and positively impact your relationship?</p>	<p>I can't think of anything.</p>
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