

Application of Social Penetration Theory to the Development of Romantic Relationships Through Social Media

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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi telah hadir dan berkembang pesat dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, salah satunya dalam hal perkembangan media sosial. Kemudahan mengakses internet menjadi salah satu faktor tingginya jumlah pengguna media sosial. Dalam menjalin hubungan dengan individu, aspek penting dalam menjalin hubungan adalah komunikasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui penerapan Self Disclosure dalam teori penetrasi sosial terhadap perkembangan hubungan romantis antar individu yang berkomunikasi secara online melalui media sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode analisis isi yaitu melakukan tinjauan pustaka dengan kata kunci penetrasi sosial, keterbukaan diri, dan media sosial. Studi ini menemukan bahwa keterbukaan diri dalam konteks pengembangan hubungan romantis online lebih berfokus pada informasi intim tentang seseorang dan apa yang mereka pilih untuk dibagikan kepada orang lain. Proses komunikasi online mempercepat percakapan di tingkat permukaan, namun jika perkembangan hubungan berada pada tahap yang lebih intim dan romantis, maka akan lebih cepat terjalin jika menggunakan komunikasi tatap muka.

Kata kunci: *Keterbukaan Diri, Media Social, Penetrasi Sosial*

Abstract

Technology development have been present and growing rapidly in everyday life, one of which is in terms of the development of social media. The ease of accessing the internet is one of the factors for the high number of social media users. In forming relationships with individuals, an important aspect in forming a relationship is communication. This study aims to determine the application of Self Disclosure in social penetration theory on the development of romantic relationships between individuals who communicate online through social media. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis method, namely conducting a literature review on the keywords social penetration, self-disclosure, and social media. This study found that self-disclosure in the context of developing romantic relationships online focuses

more on intimate information about a person and what they choose to share with others. The process of online communication speeds up surface-level conversations, but if the relationship development is in a more intimate and romantic stage, it will be more quickly established if using face-to-face communication.

Keywords: *Self Disclosure, Social Media, Social Penetration*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, there is a widespread and rapid expansion of technical advancements that infiltrate various aspects of daily existence. One aspect relates to the emergence of social media. According to Manning (2014), the concept of social media is frequently employed to describe emerging media platforms that facilitate interactive engagement. Social media, being widely utilized across the globe, has emerged as a prominent means of communication in modern society, significantly impacting the daily routines of individuals. Social media encompasses a collection of online applications rooted in Web 2.0 technology, facilitating the generation and dissemination of information among users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The utilization of social media in Indonesia is experiencing significant growth. The research findings from Data Reportal (2023) provide essential facts and trends that facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the internet and social media on an annual basis. In February 2023, the number of internet users in Indonesia accounted for 212.9 million individuals, representing approximately 77% of the overall population. Concurrently, the number of social media users in the country reached 167 million individuals, constituting approximately 60.4% of the total population in Indonesia. The accessibility of the internet is a contributing element to the significant prevalence of social media users. According to Kamil (2014), social media has facilitated unrestricted human communication, overcoming limitations of time and location.

The advent of technology, particularly the internet, has fostered the development of platforms that promote interpersonal connections among users. Examples of such platforms include social networking sites, social media, and online-based apps. People also use these establishments to interact virtually with one another. The range of interactions performed by individuals on the internet is extensive, encompassing activities such as generating, disseminating, and trading information and ideas. In contemporary society, the internet has become a platform for individuals to seek and cultivate romantic connections with other users in a virtual manner (Abdulah et al., 2014).

Communication has a crucial role in the establishment of interpersonal connections. The establishment and growth of a connection are significantly influenced by the presence of effective interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication, as defined by Joseph A. Devito (1998) in his publication *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, is the exchange of messages between two individuals or within a limited group, accompanied by consequential outcomes and immediate feedback.

Bungin (2008) believes that the advancement of digital technology has contributed to the development of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication has evolved from traditional face-to-face interactions to now include new media platforms, such as the internet.

The social penetration hypothesis offers insights into the process of relationship formation in communication. Social penetration theory is a theoretical framework that explores the process of connection formation between two individuals. The present theory discusses the framework of relationship development as outlined by the concept of social penetration. Social penetration refers to a relational phenomenon characterized by the progression of intimacy in communication from a superficial level to a more intimate level within a relationship. The assessment of an individual's level of intimacy extends beyond mere physical proximity, encompassing intellectual and emotional proximity as well, wherein the sharing of information pertaining to one's activities plays a significant role (West et al., 2010).

The concept of social penetration theory has been utilized within the realm of computer-mediated or digital communication, specifically in the context of online dating. The process of social penetration is crucial in facilitating individuals' online acquaintance, as it establishes a foundation for the subsequent decision to meet face-to-face, foster closeness, and cultivate a relationship. In the context of committed love relationships, individuals who engage with social media platforms tend to exhibit a greater tendency to question about their partner's thoughts and experiences, as well as divulge personal information, as a means of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is an integral component of the social penetration theory, which encompasses the gradual progression towards increased intimacy with others through the act of sharing personal information or engaging in reciprocal self-disclosure (Griffin, 2003).

The emergence of online dating has created a relevant context that is conducive to the examination of the Social Penetration Theory and the intricacies of self-disclosure. According to Vice.com, a wide range of online dating services, including as Tinder, OkCupid, Bumble, and Grindr, have become prominent in Indonesia. This indicates the growing prevalence of digital platforms for establishing romantic relationships within the country.

In light of the necessity to develop a full comprehension of the phenomenon of online romantic relationships aided through social media, the present study attempts to clarify the complex dynamics between self-disclosure and the stages outlined in the Social Penetration Theory. The study, entitled "Application of Social Penetration Theory to the Development of Romantic Relationships through Social Media," seeks to explore the intricate mechanisms through which individuals engage in self-disclosure within the framework of romantic relationships established through online communication on diverse social media platforms.

In regard to the widespread presence and profound influence of social media on modern interpersonal connections, it is essential to examine the relevance and use of the Social Penetration Theory. This study aims to investigate the process by which individuals engage in self-disclosure within the virtual domain, specifically focusing on

the development of romantic relationships through digital communication. Through an analysis of the function of self-disclosure within the context of social penetration theory, this study aims to provide significant contributions to our understanding of the changing dynamics of romantic relationships in the era of digital technology, as well as the potential consequences for interpersonal communication. The objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the various aspects of online dating, with a focus on understanding the intricate dynamics and potential advantages it offers in fostering love connections via social media platforms.

METHOD

Research Method and Strategy

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach in combining data quoted from several journals to gain new understanding. The selected research methodology for this study is the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Fink (2007) provides a description of the systematic literature review as an approach characterized by its systematic, explicit, complete, and reproducible nature. The process entails the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of the extant corpus of research, scholarship, and professional activity produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners (Dobbins et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study will integrate the utilization of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) criteria, in addition to SLR. The recommendations proposed by Page et al. (2021) comprise four distinct phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion criteria. These stages play a crucial role in providing guidance for the selection and assessment of reports that are in line with the scope of the research topic.

Data Criteria

This study aims to identify academic journals that discuss topics related to the Theory of Social Penetration. The selected research comprises journals written in English and adheres to the standards of international journal publication. The research was conducted by searching for keywords such as social penetration theory, self-disclosure, and social media on a search engine. The results were then filtered based on the specific requirements and relevance to the research needs. The utilized keywords encompass social penetration theory, self-disclosure, and social media.

Data Collection Technique

The data utilized comprises publications obtained from research journal databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, Sage Publication, and Taylor Francis. The articles were selected between the timeframes of 2015 and 2022 to ensure their continued relevance.

A total of 30 journals were identified through a systematic search of international standard academic journals using certain keywords and within the designated time frame. Subsequently, a rigorous selection process will be employed, wherein five

scholarly journal articles will be subjected to comprehensive analysis. The five chosen publications will be utilized for theoretical examination.

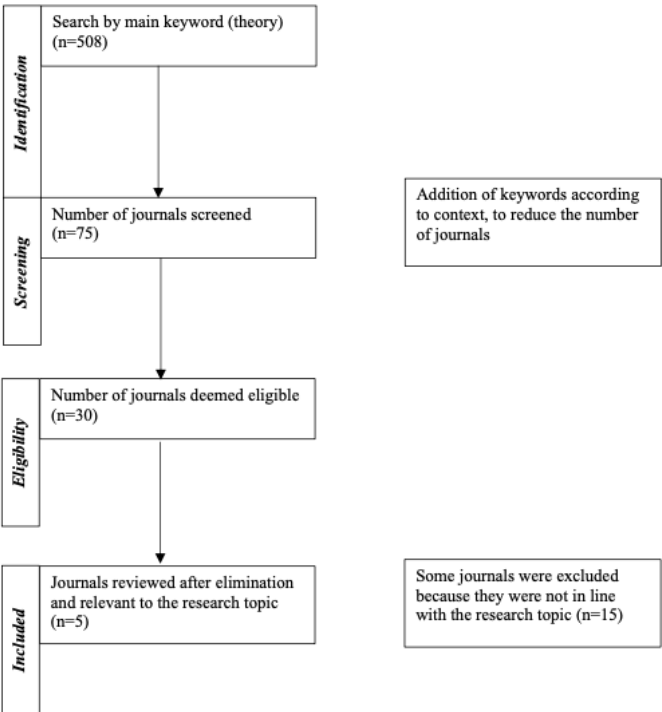


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

The outcomes of the journal search conducted by a systematic literature review are categorized into various domains, including publication year, research location, field of study, research methodology, and research findings. The overarching framework of social penetration theory in the context of romantic relationships on social media can be discerned by categorizing the findings of research studies published in five selected academic publications.

Table 1. List of Selected Journal Articles

No.	Journal	Year	Authors	Research Methods
1	Use of communication technologies in romantic relationships: Self-disclosure and the	2015	Erin K. Ruppel	Quantitative

No.	Journal	Year	Authors	Research Methods
	role of relationship Development			
2	Staying Connected: Computer-Mediated and Face-to-Face Communication in College Students' Dating Relationships	2016	Andrea M. Boyle & Lucia F. O'Sullivan	Quantitative
3	Singles Looking to Mingle: An Analysis of Self-Representation in Online Dating	2016	Leigha Jacobson, Abbey Atkinson, Ladan Mohamed & Jason Dorr	Quantitative
4	Swiping, Matching, Chatting Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure on Mobile Dating Apps	2016	Janelle Ward	Qualitative
5	Online Dating Application User Relationship Development in Finding a Life Partner (Phenomenological Study of Women Using Online Dating Applications in Jakarta)	2022	Putu Arindya Laksmidewi Marghaputra	Qualitative

Article Publication Year

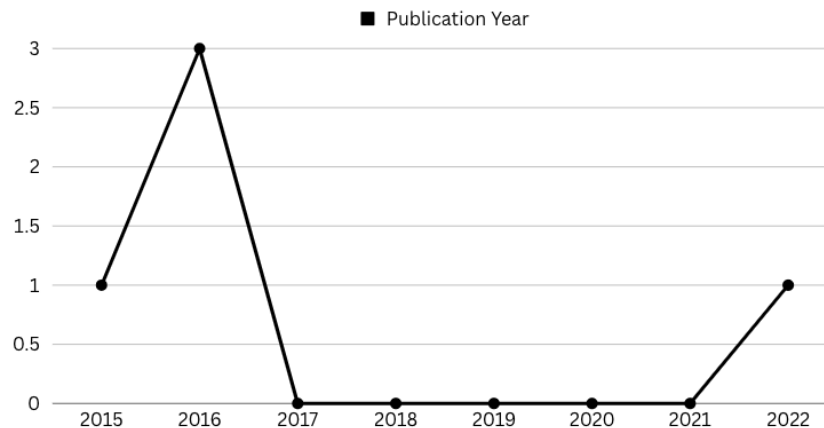


Figure 2. Article Publication Year Diagram

Upon analyzing the distribution of articles according to their publication years, an identifiable pattern becomes evident. The year 2016 exhibits the greatest concentration, with a total of three publications, representing a substantial 60% of the

selected journals. The subsequent years, namely 2015 and 2022, are significant since they each contribute one scholarly journal, collectively accounting for 20% of the overall selected journals. The temporal distribution of academic activity within the specified era reveals a notable concentration of research production in the year 2016. Although there is a decrease in representation in the following years, the diversification of publications throughout various years adds to a more nuanced comprehension of the temporal dynamics within the field of study.

Research Country Location

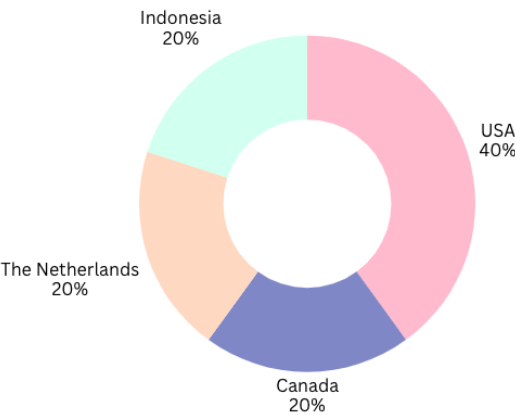


Figure 3. Research Country Location Diagram

An examination of the geographical location of research conducted in various countries reveals distinct patterns. The United States is identified as the primary research site, making a significant contribution to two journals and containing 40% of the total selected journals. Following that, Canada, the Netherlands, and Indonesia each exhibit a distinctive characteristic with one journal, accounting for 20% of the total for each respective country. The observed geographical distribution of participants in the study of the selected research topic indicates a wide range of global involvement. The prominence of the United States as a hub for scholarly endeavors in this discipline is underscored by the concentration of research output. Simultaneously, the incorporation of scholarly publications originating from Canada, the Netherlands, and Indonesia serves to emphasize the global reach and cooperative character of academic inquiry in investigating the topic within many geographic settings.

Research Field of Study

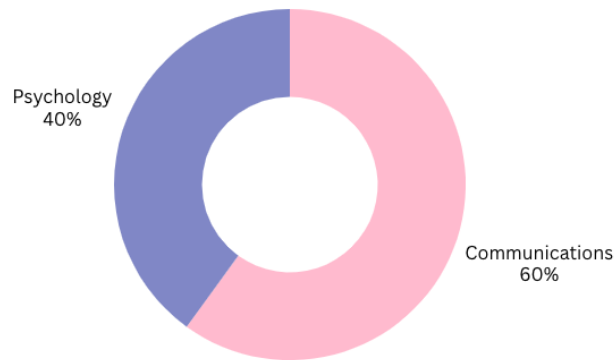


Figure 4. Research Field of Study Diagram

The chosen journals encompass a range of fields, including communication and psychology. The field of communication exhibits a significant presence, as evidenced by three prominent journals that collectively account for 60% of the overall scholarly publications in the discipline. The field of psychology is characterized by the presence of two prominent journals, which collectively account for 40% of the total selection of publications. The disciplinary distribution in question places significant emphasis on the intersectionality of these areas in the examination of the selected research topic. This serves to highlight the wide range of viewpoints and insights that are contributed by both the disciplines of communication and psychology.

Research Methods

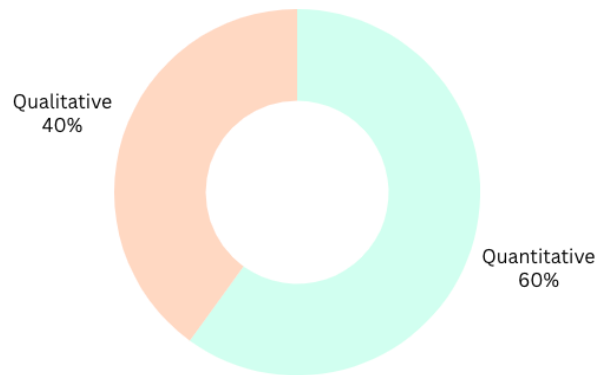


Figure 5. Research Methods Diagram

In the field of research methods, the chosen journals employ either qualitative or quantitative methodologies. A total of three journals, accounting for sixty percent of the sample, were subjected to quantitative analysis using survey methods, specifically through the administration of questionnaires. In contrast, the two remaining journals,

which accounted for 40% of the selected sample, were subjected to qualitative analysis utilizing in-depth interview methodologies. The presence of many methodologies in this study not only demonstrates the range of approaches employed by researchers but also emphasizes the thorough examination of the selected research subject using both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Discussions

The examination of the utilization of social penetration as a strategic approach in the context of interpersonal disclosure and information seeking within the realm of romantic relationship development via social media can be analyzed by employing the framework of layers of self-disclosure as outlined in Social Penetration Theory, which was originally proposed by Altman and Taylor in 1973.

The study undertaken by Ruppel (2015) contributes to the existing body of research by investigating the impact of voice-based communication technology on relationship building and self-disclosure using communication technology. Self-disclosure is considered a fundamental premise within the framework of Social Penetration Theory. When individuals engage in face-to-face communication, as opposed to text-based communication, within less-formed relationships, they tend to exhibit a wider range of self-disclosure. By engaging in direct, in-person communication, individuals are able to predict and expect the continuous exchange of information and ideas with their counterpart. In order to comprehensively examine the motives and results associated with the utilization of communication technology in ongoing relationships, it is imperative to consider the attributes of both the communication model (i.e., face-to-face communication or communication technology) and the nature of the relationship itself.

According to theories about relationship development, such as Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory, changes in the nature of interactions are a sign of how relationships are developing. As interpersonal connections progress, individuals encounter several considerations pertaining to self-representation. Considering the varying stages of relationship development, it is expected that individuals will employ communication technologies in distinct ways.

Self-disclosure has been identified as a means to both express and strengthen intimacy within the realm of developing closer relationships (Derlega et al., 1993). Altman and Taylor's (1973) concept of social penetration emphasizes the significance of both the breadth and depth dimensions of self-disclosure in the process of establishing and maintaining relationships. The concept of breadth of self-disclosure pertains to the extent to which individuals reveal various content domains or facets of their personalities, whereas depth of self-disclosure pertains to the level of intimacy associated with the material disclosed within a certain content domain (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Individuals who engage in text-based communication technologies, such as instant messaging, have a tendency to disclose personal information more frequently and with a higher level of intimacy compared to those who communicate in face-to-face

interactions. This study argues that the utilization of communication technology for establishing communication provides a reduced number of cues, such as linguistic, audible, or visual information, compared to face-to-face contact. According to Baym et al. (2004), the concept of diminished social cues continues to be a fundamental aspect of the examination of communication technologies. A study conducted by Joinson (2001) examined the notion that self-disclosure is more prevalent in text-based interactions compared to video-based interactions. The findings of this study indicated that cue reduction in online communication platforms may potentially foster self-disclosure among persons who are in the process of establishing relationships through social media.

Therefore, it is believed that the utilization of communication technology in online settings promotes self-disclosure due to the reduction of self-consciousness often associated with self-disclosure as well as the effectiveness of self-disclosure in fostering relationship growth. The aforementioned statement is in opposition to the conclusions drawn from the aforementioned research, which offers valuable perspectives on the utilization of communication technology and the act of self-disclosure within close love partnerships. In general, the results indicate that individuals exhibit a preference for face-to-face communication as opposed to reduced-cue communication technology when it comes to self-disclosure. However, it is worth noting that the development of relationships may play a significant role in shaping this preference. The process of relationship development in couples is often accompanied by notable shifts in communication patterns. In the context of interpersonal relationships, it is generally anticipated that the extent and profundity of self-revelation will expand as the relationship progresses. It can be argued that the utilization of communication technology, specifically text messaging within the realm of social media, plays a role in facilitating self-disclosure among individuals. However, when it comes to the progression of relationships into a more intimate and romantic stage, face-to-face communication is more effective in expediting the establishment of such connections.

In the context of enduring relationships, people frequently partake in interpersonal exchanges with their significant others and are frequently presented with the option to select the method of communication for these exchanges. Consequently, the association between the utilization of communication technology and the results of these conversations is intricate. The observed connections between these linkages can be attributed to a range of concurrent elements, such as the deliberate utilization of communication technologies to attain certain conversational objectives, the habitual employment of commonly utilized communication methods, and the influence of technology on these dynamics (Joinson, 2001).

According to a study conducted by Boneva and Kraut in 2002, as cited in Ruppel (2015), internet communication is frequently employed for both mundane tasks like scheduling meetings and for more strategic endeavors in the formation of romantic relationships. However, it is worth noting that certain themes, such as dispute conversation, small talk, and expressing affection, may exhibit distinct patterns.

According to the prevailing viewpoint, it is anticipated that the progression of a relationship will influence the selection of communication modes employed by couples, as well as the manner in which they engage in communication through these modes.

In 2016, Boyle and O'Sullivan conducted a study that employed the social penetration theory (SPT) to enhance the understanding of the function and consequences of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the formation of romantic relationships. The Social Penetration Theory offers a robust theoretical framework that is widely accepted in the academic literature, facilitating a comprehensive comprehension of the development and quality of interpersonal relationships. The Social Penetration Theory posits that the process of relationship growth is characterized by deep and intimate interchange, which is primarily facilitated through two key elements: the disclosure of significant and personal self-knowledge and the active pursuit of vital and personal information about one's partner. The Social Penetration Theory proposes that the formation of relationships follows a trajectory wherein contacts begin as impersonal and non-intimate, gradually progressing towards more meaningful and intimate encounters (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2016).

According to the principles of Social Penetration theory, it is essential to consider the quantity, as well as the breadth and depth, of self-revelation within interpersonal connections. Furthermore, the research on computer-mediated communication (CMC), specifically in the context of online dating, emphasizes the significance of deliberate and favorable self-disclosure to others via CMC. Hence, the study focused on investigating the crucial aspects of self-disclosure, including the quantity, scope, intensity, and valence (both positive and negative).

The use of questions, talks, and discussions facilitates the process of learning about one's partner and, as a result, fosters a sense of intimacy. Individuals often inquire about personal matters in order to gain insights into others and acquire information about their partners through various means, including consulting mutual acquaintances or utilizing online resources like search engines or partner profile pages. Existing research on relationships with strangers and studies specifically looking at online dating suggest that asking personal questions and telling others about yourself are two of the most important ways to build mutual understanding and comfort in computer-mediated communication (CMC) settings. Increased levels of social attraction, intimacy, attachment, and liking are indicative of the accelerated establishment of relationships as compared to in-person contacts. According to Walther (1994), this phenomenon is referred to as the "hyperpersonalization effect."

Within the framework of social penetration theory, Jacobson, Atkinson, Mohamed, and Dorr (2016) examined the idea of self-disclosure as the main topic of investigation. The extent to which individuals engage in self-disclosure is contingent upon their own circumstances. When engaging in initial encounters, individuals tend to exhibit a greater inclination for privacy in the context of in-person relationships. When participating in online dating, individuals have the opportunity to divulge personal information like their city of origin, occupation, and several other personal qualities. Due to the aforementioned factors, individuals may inadvertently overlook the

customary exchange of casual conversation that typically accompanies in-person introductions. Cited from Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, and Felt (2008), self-disclosure involves overcoming anxiety and fear of potential loss in relationships as a result of sharing more intimate information. This stage of relationships is characterized by increased intimacy (Wysocki, 1996, 1998; Merkle & Richardson, 2000; McKenna et al., 2002).

The phenomenon of self-disclosure in an online environment mostly pertains to the divulgence of personal and intimate information by individuals, specifically the content they opt to share with others. The objective of this endeavor is to foster a connection. Individuals tend to engage in self-disclosure at an accelerated pace due to the availability of personal biographical information, which enables others to promptly assess and respond to individuals, facilitating the establishment of immediate interpersonal connections. The utilization of online communication platforms accelerates the pace of superficial discussions. The individual had prior knowledge about their partner's biography due to its availability on the internet, resulting in a diminished sense of intrigue. Consequently, this facilitates a more intimate and in-depth kind of dialogue.

According to Ward's (2016) study, individuals utilizing dating applications such as Tinder strategically curate the visual and textual content on their profiles with the intention of presenting themselves in a manner that elicits favorable reactions from others. This endeavor serves as one of the evaluative procedures for selecting appropriate companions or romantic partners. According to Couch and Liamputtong (2008), individuals engaging in online dating employ many filters to assess possible partners, which encompass aspects such as identification, encompassing appearance, personality, sexual interests, and risk management. The practicability of implementing some technological features on dating websites has been established in previous research. For instance, users have the ability to filter potential matches based on attributes such as height and weight (Hancock, Toma & Ellison, 2007), race (Lin & Lundquist, 2013), and educational attainment (Skopek, Schulz & Blossfeld, 2011). Nevertheless, dating applications such as Tinder offer users the ability to narrow down potential matches based only on factors such as geographical proximity, age, and gender.

The study conducted by Putu Arindya Laksmidewi Marghaputra (2022) revealed that self-disclosure was a prominent aspect throughout all the information analyzed in the research. This self-disclosure is primarily manifested in the form of pseudo-disclosure or online disclosure, facilitated by the many capabilities offered by the applications under investigation. During the preliminary portion of the meeting, the informants exclusively presented their positive attributes while excluding any mention of their negative aspects. The informants in this study each possess individual criteria for selecting a partner, which will afterwards impact the process of self-disclosure.

There are two primary factors to consider: the prospective partner's attitude towards respecting the informant's limits and the professional status of the prospective partner. Moreover, there are other factors that deter informants from maintaining their

relationships, such as the occurrence of internet fraud or the presence of threats from unethical individuals. This demonstrates the progression of a relationship through many stages, namely depenetration (withdrawal) and breakdown, which can be attributed to these variables.

CONCLUSIONS

The manner in which individuals engage in self-disclosure within the context of forming romantic relationships via social media exhibits variation. This study demonstrates that the communication process in the establishment of relationships facilitated by social media plays a significant role in self-disclosure among individuals. This is attributed to the ability to gather information about the other person through various forms of communication, such as text messages, voice recordings, audio files, and received photographs. The extent, scope, comprehensiveness, and intensity (both positive and negative) play a crucial role in self-disclosure and are investigated in studies on relationship formation using computer-mediated communication (CMC). Online dating is characterized by the utilization of self-disclosure and the posing of personal inquiries as fundamental tactics for fostering mutual understanding and connection through computer-mediated communication (CMC). The primary result of implementing these tactics is the accelerated formation of relationships in comparison to in-person interactions. The phenomenon of self-disclosure in an online environment mostly pertains to the divulgence of personal and intimate information by individuals, specifically the content they elect to share with others.

The primary objective of engaging in self-disclosure on an online platform is to establish and foster interpersonal connections. The utilization of internet communication platforms speeds up the occurrence of superficial discussions. The individual possesses prior knowledge of the biographical details of their romantic partner. However, it can be inferred that the progression of a relationship into a deeper and more romantic phase is more likely to occur at a faster pace when face-to-face communication is employed. In the context of enduring relationships, individuals frequently partake in interactions with their partners and are frequently presented with the option of selecting a mode of communication for these interactions. Consequently, the association between the utilization of communication technology and the outcomes of conversations is intricate.

Therefore, it is possible for online dating applications to transition into a more committed phase by initiating self-disclosure early on. Conversely, these relationships may also experience a stage of depenetration and dissolution as a result of several factors.

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