



Intimacy and distance in the age of technology

*How technology and digital media platforms help couples in
long-distance relationships create and nurture intimacy*

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August 2019

This study looks into the intricacies of long-distance romantic relationships and the ways in which intimacy is created and nurtured with the help of technology and digital media platforms. It uses a methodological triangulation, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative interviews, as tools to investigate the doings of couples who find themselves geographically challenged. The results point out to the fact that people adapt to these circumstances and use technology as a third player of the relationship, creating and maintaining intimacy mainly through conversations and stepping away from the physical side of a romantic relationship.

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Introduction

“Post-industrial society and its modes of production have changed the relation between work and leisure and hence also our everyday life (Giddens 1984:131 cited in Bengtsson, 2006, page 119)”

When thinking about media and love, probably all the movies and songs that we watch and hear are the first things that one could think about. As Stina Bengtsson has put it: “we must consider that our everyday media cannot be regarded as empty artefacts, without cultural meaning. There is always a kind of cultural relation constructed between the television, radio or book and the individual involved in consuming it.” (Bengtsson, 2006, page 121).

Scholar Mark Deuze writes about the nowadays’ ‘liquid society’ and the fact that one of its main prerogatives is to adapt to the “constant change, whether it is at home, at work or at play” (Deuze, 2012, page 137). Furthermore, the author points out that in the last decades, the dimensions of human life have interfered with each other and the boundaries between those have been shaken, mostly due to individuals’ use and involvement with technology, media and digital media. The ways in which media are intertwined with our everyday life, and subsequently with love and the ways we perceive and express it. Relationships of all sorts, including romantic ones, and social media are strongly connected nowadays. Hearing a couple say they met through one of the numerous existing dating apps is nothing surprising anymore. “It is not surprising that we project the possibility of love, surprise, amusement, and warmth onto our communication devices. Through them we live with a heightened sense of potential relationships, or at least of new connections. Whether or not our devices are in use, without them we feel adrift - adrift not only from our current realities but from our wishes for the future” (Turkle, 2008, page 124). The development of media technologies has undoubtedly changed the nature of long distance relationships, by offering a variety of ways to connect, thus providing access to one’s partner in a cheap and fast manner, like never before. The numerous ways in which a person can communicate with their partner: photo sharing, texts, audio and video calls, offer the sensation of “being-present” of being a part of everyday life. A long-distance relationship can be defined as a relationship where the partners continue to maintain communication, despite being geographically apart. The reasons for this type of arrangement are varied, ranging from study opportunities, work, the desire for independence or the necessity to live close to the family and many other ones.

The percentage of long-distance relationships has been on a constant rise in the last years and there has been extensive research conducted, trying to dissect their dynamics and their secret lives. The present research aims at looking into the ways in which people who are involved in long-distance relationships live with a feeling of longing, with affection possibly growing due to physical separation, while also enjoying a degree of autonomy that is not usually present in couple relationships that are not separated by distance. There exists a sort of contradiction within a long-distance romantic relationship and it is sustained and facilitated by media. In her paper, Erin M. Sahlstein emphasises how partners in LDRs “move in and out of one another’s co presence more explicitly and consciously” compared to people who are not geographically apart (Sahlstein, 2004, page 692) and this might be attributed to the usage of media platforms. The aim of the present paper is to extend the conversation beyond the realm of Facebook and bring into discussion other Social media platforms, such as: Whatsapp, Instagram, Skype, Viber, Snapchat and to explore other ways of communicating - audio and video. In order to do so, the study will use as theoretical foundation perspectives that stem from the history of technological developments, the intersection of digital media and love and will also use paradigms relating to intimacy from the realm of psychology. Weaving together theories from different areas of expertise offers allows for deeper and broader inquiries into the subject of technology, intimacy and long-distance relationships.

This thesis aims to investigate the role media, digital and social media play in the building and maintaining of intimacy in couples that are involved in long-distance relationships. The objective is to look into their habits and rituals around conversations they carry on, the frequency of interactions, what media platforms the couples choose in order to communicate with each other, if texting, audio or video calls is the preferred means of interaction, if they shy away from using media platforms and technology to sustain the physical part of their relationship or not and other details that are capable of revealing patterns of creating and maintaining intimacy.

In “Media Love” - a research project conducted by John Storey and Katy McDonald, the scholars look into the ways in which people use media when in romantic relationships, focusing on media discourses and media technologies. The results revealed that texting is the media technology mentioned the most among couples and that there were even examples where the romantic relationship “itself seems to be held together by texts” (Storey and McDonald, 2016, page 118), Facebook being the primary platform through which texts were sent. Some participants of the study pointed out that this medium offered more freedom of expression and that very often they would

write things that would be more difficult to say face to face, texting being used even as a means of seduction.

A relationship, be it long-distance or not, is difficult to survive if the two people involved in it do not put in some work, communicate and reach out to each other. Neustaedter and Greenberg refer to this set of behaviours and actions as “relationship maintenance” (Neustaedter and Greenberg, 2011, page 2), and identify three types, when it comes to LDRs: prospective, introspective and retrospective behaviours. Their study looks into the entire spectrum of activities that the couples shared over video: from sharing meals, watching the same movie or playing video games to sexual activities. Through their research, Neustaedters and Greenberg revealed that, when it comes to LDR couples, intimacy does not necessarily need to be linked to sexual intimacy, but it is more related to shared activities mediated by a video call, thus spending time together. The idea of intimacy is not “just about saying ‘I love you’”. It is about being a part of his or her life, about being day-to-day companions. Video chat is one tool that supports this.” (Neustaedter and Greenberg, 2011, page 9).

A research dating from 2013 notes that the intensity of intimate details revealed to a partner is more poignant within people involved in long-distance relationships, despite the fact that these tend to have fewer, but longer interactions on a daily basis (Jiang, 2013). The researchers who conducted the study explain this phenomenon with the fact that people usually use a variety of media platforms to keep in touch with each other. An important contribution is brought platforms that have the video function, such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Viber or the Facebook Messenger. Using Mark Deuze’s idea of togetherness and feeling connected, whilst having experiences as single individuals, independently from a romantic partner, this is exactly what this function gives them. Or, at least, strives to offer. One of the most controversial platforms of the present day, Facebook, has been pinpointed as an important element in the initial phases of a romance (Fox, Warber & Makstaller, 2013), because it can offer partners a space to meet, albeit it being virtual, as revealed by Fox, Warber and Makstaller. For a couple who do not find themselves in geographical proximity, social media can be the only link between each other and it also represents an opportunity to create a sense of intimacy. And the available selection of couple oriented apps is wide, ranging from ones such as Avocado, You&Me, Couple that represent a type of messaging app with features such as the opportunity to draw together, share photos or make the phones vibrate by placing thumb on the same spot on the screens; to apps like Happy Couple that poses all sorts of questions that partners answer to and find out more about each other. Danah Boyd analyses the intersection of people and

technology that facilitates the creation of a “community and an environment where certain practices are encouraged” (Boyd, 2014) and if we draw it back to long-distance relationships we could, perhaps, see media as means for couples to express themselves freely and to know each other better. And perhaps, another poignant parallel can be traced between the ways in which long-distance couples rely on media to maintain a romantic relationship and the ways in which media are used in a transnational context by expats and people who are away from their families, as pointed out by scholar Mirca Madianou, who brings out the example of mothers who are obliged to work abroad and rely on smartphone connections to keep in touch with their children, to continue being present in their lives (Madianou, 2013).

Empirically, this study will employ quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the results. The ten couples chosen to participate in the study were recruited via Facebook, after they responded to posts informing about the study. The initial sample contained 15 couples willing to participate as informants, but five of them decided to drop out, the final group containing 20 informants - ten couples. The age of the participants ranges from 21 years old, an informant located in Italy, to 32 years old, a participant based in Stockholm. The median age is 28 years old. The informants are located on five continents, in the following cities: Stockholm, Paris, Oslo, Torino, Tallinn, Barcelona, New Delhi, Managua, Manilla, Izmir, Istanbul, Johannesburg. With the exception of two couples who met online, all of the other eight couples met face to face first and then developed a romantic relationship. The biggest time difference between a couple is eight hours, with one person living in Stockholm and the other one living in Managua; and the second being 6 hours, between Manilla and Stockholm. The reasons for the couples maintaining the relationships at long distance are work related relocations and study related ones, but there are also two couples who have been living in different countries from the start of the relationships. Nine of the couples are heterosexual, with one couple being formed by two women. Through media diaries a tracking of interaction habits will be achieved, each person participating in the study being asked to fill in a media diary related to their communication with their partner, such as: frequency of interactions, preferred modes of communication, do the participants engage in other activities while interacting with each other, what do the informants converse about. These diaries will reveal patterns of communication, using digital and social media, that will be analysed with the help of quantitative parameters, for maintaining relationships that are challenging from a geographical point of view. The qualitative method is comprised of interviews with each participant to the study that will facilitate a better overview over the matters analysed, especially when looking into intimacy and what it actually

entails for each informant. Being a concept that is difficult to grasp just with the help of quantitative data, it is necessary to include interviews, where the informants can expand and speak freely about their understanding of intimacy and how it is maintained with the help of technology.

Aim and Research questions

Maintaining intimate interactions and creating a feeling of intimacy when we discussing people that are geographically separated, can prove to be extremely challenging because there is one vital factor missing - physical contact. What the present study aims to do is to try and uncover the ways in which the participants perceive intimacy and how it is created and nourished when mediated through technological devices. Furthermore, the study investigates what are the functions of digital/social media that help create intimacy and how do people involved in long-distance relationships make use of these functions.

The aim of the research is to document and analyze the role of digital media and social media platforms and the ways in which these are used to create and maintain intimacy in relationships between people that are geographically apart.

In order to get a better understanding of the purpose of the present study, it is important to clearly define and understand key concepts and elements involved in the research. Therefore, the aim of the research is investigated with the help of three research questions that reveal how the couples involved in the study understand intimacy, what the role of digital and social media are in their everyday life and also in their relationship, and, most importantly, what the connection between digital/social media and intimacy is in the case of couples involved in long-distance relationships.

1. What is the role of digital media used by couples in long-distance relationships and how do they use these technologies?

This research looks into newer digital and social media platforms, that have gained more popularity in the last couple of years, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, and it also focuses on couple related activity on social media, such as photos, statuses, mentions of partnersm hashtags - any posts related to their couple. Previous research, conducted by Fox, Warber and Markstaller discusses extensively the role of Facebook during the initial phases of a relationship, concluding that “whether or not Facebook is a blip or an era in the context of human history, social technologies will continue to play a seminal role in future relationships” (Fox, Warber & Markstaller, 2013, page

20). As technology and media platforms have evolved and multiplied in the last six years, it would be useful to look into the role Facebook plays nowadays in long-distance relationships and whether there are other platforms that are used more extensively.

2. How is intimacy defined by people involved in long-distance relationships?

The present study deals with intimacy mediated by a screen, therefore it is important to understand the depth and facets of intimacy and to include the opinion of people who are physically apart on this subject. This sub-question will help determine if there is a red thread connecting the idea of intimacy across couples that are geographically separated. In their study analysing interpersonal intimacy, Anna Lomanowska and Matthieu Guitton (2016) look into the characteristics of intimacy in the digital age, but the researchers also address the meaning of intimacy over time and how it was defined by other scholars. Lomanowska and Guitton rely on an idea issued by Prager in 1995, that sees intimacy as “a dyadic exchange that involves sharing what is personal and private,” adding that it is born from interactions that involve “both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as shared behavioral, physical, emotional, and cognitive experience” (Prager, 1995 cited in Lomanowska and Guitton, 2016, page 139).

3. How is intimacy created and maintained by couples in long-distance relationships with the help of digital media?

Finally, the third research question will bring together the two key concepts this research is built around - intimacy and the role of digital/social media in long-distance relationships. The present research's focus is on uncovering how one facilitates the other and whether intimacy built with the help of technology can be compared to intimacy that is achieved when physical contact is present. This particular step will be based on answers and data retrieved with the help of the qualitative part of the analysis - the interviews, with the informants discussing about the intricacies of their relationships when they are apart and also when they are physically together, what topics they choose to discuss and if these depend on the partners' proximity, if their partner is different when seen on a screen compared to real life. Another important aspect that this subquestion looks into is the physical part of a relationship and what is the role of technology in maintaining it.

This research will add to the existing knowledge about the intricate inner workings of long-distance relationships and the ways digital and social media manage to create intimacy, something that is conventionally thought of as achieved through physical proximity.

The paper is structured into several parts that deal with long-distance relationships, their specificities, routines: initiating and timing chats and talks, parallel activities, such as: sharing meals, watching movies, playing video games, or at times, sexual acts. The focus is on intimacy mediated by technology, how it can be defined and if it can only be placed in one defining box and media, focusing on its role as a third part of a relationship. In their article analysing intimacy mediated by video services, Neustaedter and Greenberg mention that computer mediated communication has been shown to “ease loneliness and increase feeling of closeness, relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment, while lowering jealousy” (Neustaedter and Greenberg, 2011, page 1). This master thesis will discuss previous research about long-distance relationships and research on digital and social media in order to provide contextualization. This will be followed by a description of and discussion about the choice of methodology and how it was utilized. The last chapters present the findings and discuss how this study and the knowledge gathered through the results and analysis can help understand better the dynamics of a relationship that is carried on through through the mediation of technological tools. The results of the present master thesis will be based upon the analysis of long-distance experiences of the 10 couples that participate in the research.

Literature review

In order to conduct this study, it is important to create a theoretical basis that can support the empirical research. Therefore, the literature review brings together ideas and paradigms from different areas of expertise. Firstly, it is important to look into technological innovations and how these have become intertwined and have shaped our human experiences, as pointed out by scholars such as August Grant, Bruno Latour and Don Ihde.

The next step in building the foundation of theoretical framework of the study is connecting technological developments to the rise of social media platforms, dating websites and applications and communication platforms, and the impact those have had on how we start and view romantic relationships nowadays. For the purpose of the study, it is important to look into how all of these changes and additions to our lives have influenced the ways people meet nowadays, their dating rituals and more importantly, how these changes have facilitated the existence of long-distance relationships.

And lastly, an incursion into the field of psychology was necessary in order to discuss and analyse the concept of intimacy and what is its role specifically in romantic relationships.

Technology

“(Technology) It is the architect of our intimacies” - Sherry Turkle

Technological mediation is omnipresent. Our lives are imbued with its thousands of invisible webs that shape and influence even the tiniest of actions and choices. Notice the alarm that wakes up in the morning, the thumbs that move rapidly on the surface of screens, - saying “Hello” or “How are you?”, saying I love you or delivering bad news, signing contracts, reading the news, the food and packages that get delivered just by pressing some keys on a keyboard, the romances that are birthed - results of fortuitous matches. In “Communication technology update and fundamentals”, August E. Grant says that we are surrounded by communication technologies, that these are “critical to commerce, essential to entertainment, and intertwined in our interpersonal relationships”, also dubbing it the “nervous system of contemporary society” (Grant, 2016, page 1). The industrial revolution proved to be a turning point in the history of communication technologies, because these started to be introduced in the majority of areas of “production and distribution of manufactured goods” (Grant, 2016, page 1).

“Technology is an important cause of the social changes happening in a nation” (Rogers, 1986, page 23), Everett M. Rogers wrote in his book, “Communication Technology”. More than thirty years later, I believe that this statement can be extended, technology being a crucial element that is able to provoke changes in nations, but also unite opposite ends of the world and connect people in a way that was never before possible.

In the last couple of decades, a quest for understanding the role of technology and digital media within the human experience has been going on. Several approaches regarding technological mediation, be those sociological, philosophical or psychological have been advanced, discussed and, at times, disputed. But between us, humans, and the results of these actions, there are gadgets and wires and satellites, and providers that we hardly ever think of.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger was immensely interested in the meaning of being and one important step towards understanding this concept was to pay attention to the world around us, because being is not just about existing, in Heidegger’s view, but it implies a certain degree of engagement with our surroundings. Thus, Heidegger developed the Tool Analysis and uses the example of a hammer that seems to be just an object, a presence-at-hand (Vorhandenheit). But in

the moment that it is picked up and put to use, the hammer acquires readiness-at-hand (Zuhandenheit) and the hammer quite simply “disappears”, is lost from our sight and becomes a pathway, a connection between our humanity and our actions. “That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves (...)” (Heidegger, 1962, p.99). This theory can be applied to our interactions being mediated by technology, it becoming an invisible pathway towards an action, a connection, even towards intimacy. Technology manages to evade, to escape from plain sight, but that does not mean that it evaporates itself, it still works “in silence” - shaping, influencing, constantly redefining boundaries, routines and relationships.

An important figure in technology studies, researcher Don Ihde, posed several questions related to technology and everyday human experience, trying to identify and analyze several types of human-technology relations. Ihde bases his findings on a post-phenomenological approach towards technology and emphasises four types of liaisons when it comes to the human - technology - world rapport: embodiment relations, hermeneutic relations, alterity relations and background relations. Don Ihde describes our existence as “technologically textured”, because the rhythms and spaces of daily life are imbibed and conditioned by our usage of gadgets and digital media. In “Technology and the Lifeworld: from Garden to Earth”, Ihde analyses the first hour of the morning and emphasises all the occasions that technology, one way or another, is “thoroughly intertwined with our activities” (Ihde, page 2).

One of the roles technologies play is to mediate the ways in which human beings exist in the world, from our choice of action, to our behaviours and ways of doing things. Pertinent examples being the fact that people are able to interact with each other while multitasking, meetings being replaced by video calls, reading a physical copy of a book being swapped with reading a book on our phones, or deciding what to buy based on the latest trends populating our Social Media feeds. But there is also another side of the coin, with technology mediating how humans understand and interpret their surroundings - the world. Don Ihde defined two ways of perceiving the world - micro and macro, with the first one being based on our sensory functions and the second one taking those sensory perceptions and constructing our personal view of the world. Technologies negotiate our perceptions, the ways in which we see, feel, hear and make sense of the world around us.

In “Morality and Technology: The End of the Means”, Bruno Latour brings an interesting perspective to the discussion of the role and the space technology has started to assume in the last decades. Latour refers to an idea promulgated by Jacques Ellul, according to which “some technologies end up invading the whole horizon of ends by setting up their own laws, by becoming ‘autonomous’ and no longer merely automatic.” Even though it might seem a bit far fetched, they

ways in which relationships of any sort, romantic or not, are conducted and maintained nowadays are more often than not mediated through a screen. Laptops, tablets, smartphones become the guardians and shapers of our connections with other people.

Latour portrays the relationship between humankind and technology as one of power play, where the people's lives unfold mediated and influenced by the latter. Technology and, implicitly, digital media can be compared nowadays, the age of digital surveillance, to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. A watchman who is always there to watch over the human experience - the actions, the habits, the relationships that are created.

In the majority of instances terms such as "communications" or "media" are brought into a discussion, the image that most people have in their minds is that of the, at times obtrusive, social media platforms or other technology interferences with our everyday lives. And when we think of the history of communication and media, there are several moments in history that are usually emphasised, such as the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the first attempts at communication, such as drawings and scribbles, the evolution and spreading of newspapers. But the truth is, communications and media have a far longer and intricate history.

In 2007, danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, wrote about the dawn of social network sites, their history and their evolution, defining them as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by other within the system" (boyd and Ellison, 2007, page 211). 1997 was the year when the first social network platform, called SixDegrees.com, was launched and it offered the possibility for people to connect in an easier manner and to reach each other out through messages. But in the more than 20 years that have passed since, the universe of digital and media platforms has expanded and changed immensely.

In "Philosophy of Technology", Don Ihde takes stock of thinkers throughout time who noticed the influence technology had on people and how they conducted their lives. The researcher emphasises Jose Ortega's idea of an interactive self - "I am I plus circumstances" (Ihde, page 96), where circumstances are considered technologies and the effects that the infiltration of technology and digital media have caused in all aspects of life nowadays. Ihde also addresses the ambiguity attributed to technology and its exact definition, by coming up with the concept of "multistability" (Ihde, page 144). In order to illustrate and offer a more extensive and profound understanding of what multistability implies, Ihde relies on the example of visual perception, the so-called Necker cube, a figure that can yield a plethora of interpretations when analysing it. "Its

aim is to examine the variations exhaustively to show structural or invariant features. With that search of possibility-structures in mind, such an analysis further deconstructs such multistable objects” (Ihde, page 145). Therefore, the figure offers multiple meanings, while a certain, definite “essence” remains difficult to pinpoint, as it is a panoply of things at once. According to Ihde, the same idea can be applied to the relation between technology and culture or humanity. It is hard to talk about technology as a phenomenon on its own, because the context in which we discuss technology is when it is in use. Thus, it acquires multiple identities and this feature of being multistable. The interpretation of the same object, phenomenon can suffer mutations and differences due to the context it is used in.

The American sociologist and psychologist Sherry Turkle often tells a little anecdote about a text she received from her daughter before one of her speeches and she mentions that getting that text was like getting a hug, a phrase that is extremely interesting to analyse, because it mixes two things that are not compatible - physical intimacy and technology. “As we instant-message, e-mail, text and Twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude” (Turkle, page 11). Turkle comes up with the term “alone together”, that also being the title of her 2011 book, whose meaning implies that nowadays people are more confused and unsure of their connection to other people, technology mediated interactions making it more difficult to understand if people are brought closer together or if they drift in different directions, unable to find a common ground, a spot that allows to establish an authentic connection. One of the most striking sentences of “Alone together” is the one stating that what people truly want from “public space is to be alone with their personal networks” (Turkle, page 14).

The little gadgets that seem to accompany every moment of our days have managed to assert such psychological power that not only do they influence our actions, but they also shape us, shape who we are. “... on the street, we speak into the invisible microphones on our mobile phones and appear to be talking to ourselves. We share intimacies with the air as though unconcerned about who can hear us or the details of our physical surroundings” (Turkle, page 16). A few years ago, this scenario would have seemed outrageous, how could anyone share intimacies into a tiny microphone, while strolling down the street? Nowadays, it is just the way we do some things. These kinds of things have managed to sneak into our daily lives and have become simply...familiar.

What technology and the advances of digital media have managed to do is to simply tap into some of the most poignant humane vulnerabilities - the need to connect, fear of loneliness, the need for approval, the appeal of creating a new persona. Sherry Turkle calls technology “seductive”, because

it toys with our human vulnerabilities and teases us with the opportunity of a clean, albeit virtual, slate - a chance to press the restart button and create a new life, a new persona. “We recreate ourselves as online personae and give ourselves new bodies, homes, jobs, and romances” (Turkle, page 11). These effects have infiltrated themselves into our relationships and even opened up the possibility of creating relationships not just by machine mediation, but also with robots. Turkle continues her investigation by describing how networked gadgets open up the chance to develop “machine-mediated” relationships with each other - a step towards becoming inseparable from our devices. “We remake ourselves and our relationships with each other through our new intimacy with machines” (Turkle, 2017, page 2). In the same book, “Alone together”, Turkle discusses the value of intimacy and authenticity in relationships, referring to the rising trend of children and the elderly, or any person who feels lonely and is in search of connection, using machines and robots. “Sociable robots and online life both suggest the possibility of relationships the way we want them. Just as we can program a made-to-measure robot, we can reinvent ourselves as comely avatars. We can write the Facebook profile that pleases us. We can edit our messages until they project the self we want to be” (Turkle, page 12). The researcher talks about our loneliness and need to connect that coexist with our fear of intimacy and emphasises how this duality is made possible by technology (Turkle, 2017, page 2). Society, at least, western societies have become glued to their gadgets, to their smartphones, because these are keepers of people’s entire world: be it professional dealings, family, friends, romantic liaisons. It might seem as something belonging to a dystopian novel, but there are more and more instances when people feel separation anxiety, if they don’t find themselves in the proximity of their smartphones. Even if the devices are not used, their absence triggers a feeling of being disconnected from the world.

During her investigations, Sherry Turkle discovered also that what the advance and development of technology has brought into our lives and the ways we communicate with each other is the substitution of actual talking with texting, chatting, instant-messaging, as it seems to be more efficient and people are kept at safe bay of revealing too much of themselves. This is an idea that would be extremely poignant when it comes to romantic relationships that are maintained long-distance: are the people involved willing to reveal as much of themselves in front of a screen as they would in person? Is there a difference between the real life person and the one whose voice their partner hears or whose face they see on a screen? If in the near past people made phone calls whenever they needed to solve a problem or reconnect with someone, nowadays the solution to the problem or the feeling of being intimate, the much sought after connection is at the reach of our fingertips.

In the second part of her book “Alone Together”, called “Networked”, Sherry Turkle discusses our online lives, the positive aspects of technology and instant connectedness it offers, but makes sure to note that the heroic narrative is not the only one when it comes to technology and digital media. There is another side to this development - people finding themselves alone, even if connected by Facebook or Instagram profiles, even if there are “likes” and comments on their posts and even during conversations that are usually conducted on a haste, while doing another task, commuting, for example. It would be of great interest and insightful to apply these observations to people involved in romantic long-distance relationships and analyse if these mediated connections offer them enough relationship satisfaction.

Turkle often states that technology is making a bid to redefine human connection - how we care for each other, how we care for ourselves, but it’s also giving us the opportunity to affirm our values and our direction.

One important shift that has taken place in the last decade is the fact that nowadays, due to the development of mobile phones’ functionalities, there is a tendency to move all mediated communication from the laptop or computer towards the smartphone. This device does not offer only mobility, but also facilitates connectivity, anywhere, at any time. With the spread of wireless access to the Internet, mobile communication has gained more and more popularity, not solely because of the mobility factor, but mostly because of the possibility to be connected at any given time, in any given place. A Pew Research Center study, dating from 2017, revealed that the median smartphone usage is 43% on a global scale, South Korea registering the highest number of smartphone users with 88%. On a global scale, Europe, North America and Australia are on the top of the ranking. Emerging and developing economies have registered a bump in smartphone ownership “climbing from a median of 21% in 2013 to 37% in 2015” (Poushter, 2017, page 5). These statistics stand as proof for how ubiquitous smartphones are becoming and how easy it is to connect with people in other parts of the world, just with the help of this device and access to the Internet.

Long-distance relationships and technology

A man and then a woman are seen raising their wine glasses and then each of them takes a bite from a pizza slice. They smile at each other and wink. Suddenly the screen splits and we can see that

each one of them are sitting at a table... in front of a tablet screen. “No matter where you are. If you're together”, appears written on the screen. These are scenes from a Dutch commercial for a pizza brand, but it might as well be a scene happening in kitchens or dining rooms across the world, with the protagonists not being only heterosexual. Unlike the commercial and as mentioned before, the present study does not focus solely on heterosexual couples, but also analyses the intricacies and routines of same sex long-distance couples. The idea and concept of togetherness of being together has shifted up until the point of it happening even if it mediated by two screens. No matter where people are, they can still be together, they can still have intimate moments.

The concept of dating nowadays can be equated to uploading several pictures of yourself, writing a short text and then proceeding to swipe left or right, in the search for love. Tinder, Bumble, Happn, Grindr and a plethora more of dating apps are the result of decades of evolution in matters of online dating, a trend that emerged at the end of the 50s with Happy Families Planning Services, a class project initiated by two students at Stanford University. It involved a series of questions arranged in a questionnaire and an IBM 650. Things evolved further with telephone dating systems, mail-order brides, match.com, OkCupid and many others, including the use of e-mail. The story of Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks falling in love in “You’ve got mail!” is probably one of the most poignant examples in pop culture regarding the rise of dating being facilitated by technology and digital media. Then came Tinder, an app that managed to revolutionise dating, moving it from the laptop into the palm of our hands - in our smartphones, as Sherry Turkle has put it “Today, the near-ubiquity of handheld and palm-size computing and cellular technologies that enable voice communication, text messaging, e-mail and Web access have made connectivity commonplace” (Turkle, 2008, page 121). For a majority of time in history, a person’s choice regarding their “better half” was reduced by their circumstances of location, class, religion and other details that played important roles. Geographic, age, class barriers are blurred or completely erased with the help of dating apps, that also benefit from a ‘simplified’ process when it comes to choosing partners, without questionnaires to fill.

Long-distance relationships are more frequent than ever in the history of humanity, and an important part of the credit for that goes to the invention on Internet and subsequently, social media platforms, that make it possible for physical distances to be erased. Vincent Miller explored this idea by tying it to the concept of individualization, “a process in which communities and personal relationships, social forms and commitments are less bound by history, place and tradition. That is, individuals, freed from the contexts of tradition, history and, under globalization, space, are free to,

and perhaps forced to, actively construct their own biographies and social bonds” (Miller, 2008, page 388). And that is exactly what online dating, especially the mobility of dating apps, have achieved - offering people the possibility to create new social bonds and perhaps, even new lives. The rise and development of digital media have forever changed long-distance relationships between people who are geographically separated. Nowadays, keeping in touch with your partner even if you are separated by thousands of kilometres and many time zones is not as complicated as it used to be in the times of letters and telegrams.

Another interesting thing to explore are the ways in which love is connected to media and the expression of this feeling is shown on social media platforms. Researcher Vincent Miller discusses this new found necessity to “tell all or expose oneself” (Miller, 2008, page 389) and identifies it as a consequence of “several processes, including an ever increasing need for self-clarification, social validation and relationship development, which are satisfied through acts of self-disclosure” (Miller, 2008, page 389). When connecting this to social media, we can safely attest that there has been a constant grow in people’s tendency to show and discuss about their relationships on blogs, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The number of engagements, marriages, pregnancy announcements posted about on social media has been on the rise and in recent years, the usage of hashtags such as #coupleselfie, #couplegoals, #relationshipgoals, #relationshipgoals, #heputaringonit has been more and more frequent on Instagram. Even the omnipresent #selfie has been transformed to fit the “birth” of a new couple on social media, by being transformed into #usie, an amalgamation of the words “us” and “selfie.” An interesting phenomenon is also the “tradition” of creating personalised hashtags for events such as weddings. Miller has also written about the need for the display of emotion, “more properly the obvious and overt display of emotion” (Miller, 2008, page 389) is akin to a capital that can be employed in order to create an image to present to the world. It is as if, couples who display more of their relationship on social media lead a life that is more interesting or more full of love.

I would like to return to Deuze’s idea about us living in media nowadays and emphasise the need to acknowledge the important role media have played in the relationships all individuals foster in their lives. Media and love are extremely important things in our day to day lives and the vastness of what they mean and how they influence us, our social interactions and personal relationships are things that are constantly changing and therefore, should be analysed and researched throughout time. Technology and media might evolve more and more over the years, but love and the need for intimacy will always represent basic needs and will always be genuine feelings, even if they are

initiated, nurtured and mediated through screens, because these “include the promise of affection, conversation, a sense of new beginnings” (Turkle, 2008, page 125).

In her study of Philipino migrants based in the UK, scholar Mirca Madianou looks deeper into the relationship between technology, specifically smartphones, and the long-distance familial and friendly relationships that these people try to maintain. The results showed that mobile phones are “becoming integral to the way family relationships are performed and experienced” (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Mentioning Goggin’s research, Madianou points out that smartphones have become ubiquitous, and have long surpassed their initial aim of serving as communications technique, but have transformed into ecosystems where media content is being created, shared, watched by millions of people.

There is a tendency of young people, Millennials and Generation Z, specifically, using less and less social networks and turning instead to instant messaging platforms, and this can be viewed as a consequence of us living in the age of mobile phones nowadays.

Intimacy

Relationships are vital and central elements of the human experience and in the last couple of years, the attention towards closeness and intimacy, two foundational blocks of relationships have garnered more and more attention from the scientific community. These concepts are researched from a cross-generational point of view, family relationships, friendships and, of course, romantic liaisons.

I believe it is important to discuss and analyse one of the key concepts this research is built on - intimacy.

Intimacy is a word that carries a rather varied spectrum of meanings and significance, those referring to the feeling of familiarity, the bond forged with another person, a thing, a location or place or, perhaps, a period of time in our lives. It penetrates a plethora of relationships created in a person’s life, be those parent - child, friendships, sexual and romantic ones. Two people can have a sexual encounter soon after meeting each other, a friend discloses a deeply personal to another person and the response is empathetic and compassionate, a parent reads a goodnight story to their child - these can all be perceived as moments of intimate connection.

In order to paint a better picture of what this concept entails, it is necessary to delve into the realm of psychology and search for meanings and explanations of intimacy.

In their study about intimacy, Barry F. Moss and Andrew I. Schwebel state that despite the fact that intimacy can be experienced in all sorts of interpersonal relationships, it is most often “sought in romantic relationships” and adding that people analyse their relationships using intimacy as a scale (Moss and Schwebel, 1993 page 31). Their computer-assisted study scanned through scholarly publications and books and found 61 definitions given to intimacy. Moss and Schwebel penned the following definition for conjugal intimacy, stating that in enduring romantic relationships it “is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal relationship” (Moss and Schwebel, 1993, page 33). The researchers identify five elements that help create intimacy between two people who are romantically involved: commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive or psychic intimacy, physical intimacy and mutuality.

According to a definition of intimacy penned by Karen J. Prager, it represents “a kind of interaction in which partners (i) reveal something personal or private, (ii) experience positive feelings about themselves, the other person and the interaction; and (iii) perceive the interaction to have advanced or reflected the partners; understanding of one another” (Prager cited in Prager and Buhrmester, 1998, page 436).

When trying to identify a complete definition of this concept, Prager stated that intimacy “overlaps with concepts such as love, closeness, self-disclosure, support, bonding, attachment, and sexuality” (Prager, 1997, page 13). The scholar also emphasises that intimacy is a natural concept, thus it is a rather difficult endeavour to pinpoint a singular definition, because it is complicated to specify its features, and it is known that scientific research relies on the accuracy of logical ideas and arguments.

Psychological studies and research have proved that intimacy is one of the core elements of well-being, Abraham Maslow including it as a primary psychological need in his pyramid of needs.

The present master thesis attempts to study if and how can intimacy be built and maintained when one of the five elements identified by Moss and Schwebel is missing, that being physical intimacy. This small-scale study represents an attempt at providing insights about rituals and habits related to the use of technology in geographically challenged relationships and how these help build and maintain a form of digital intimacy.

Intimacy in long-distance relationships has proved to be a field that is not often explored by scholars, due to a rather outdated understanding that geographic proximity and face to face interactions are crucial when it comes to creating and maintaining a close romantic connection, shared values and a deep emotional relationship. This is an opinion that L. Crystal Jiang and Jeffrey

T. Hancock tried to explore in their 2013 article, titled “Absence makes the communication grow fonder: Geographic separation, Interpersonal Media, and Intimacy in Dating Relationships”. The scholars based their study on the school of thought that defines intimacy as “derived from transactions of self-disclosure and perceived partner responsiveness. Self-disclosure generally refers to the communication of personal facts, thoughts, and emotions to another” (Jiang & Hancock, 2013, page 557).

To conclude the theoretical framework chapter, it is important to mention that the analysis will be carried on with the help of paradigms mentioned above. Paradigms put forward by Deuze and Ihde, where media has become omnipresent, but not always perceptible represents and the influence it has on people’s lives represent the basis for researching the attitude geographically challenged couples have and the role they attribute to technology, media and communication platforms, when it comes to being intimate with their partner. Vincent Miller’s idea of people having the need to expose themselves in online environments is an observation that might provide insights into long-distance relationships and their presence or absence from social media and whether this plays a role for the informants. Madianou’s observation about smartphones becoming ecosystems and digital guardians of our relationships is useful when investigating what gadgets are chosen by the people involved in long-distance relationships. Sherry Turkle’s observations about

One other important aspect to look into is the idea of intimacy as discussed by Moss and Schwebel, where physicality plays an important role. It is vital to investigate how couples use technology in order to deal with the sexual side of their relationship and if they consider themselves intimate in the absence of physicality.

Methodology

Sample

A total of 10 couples took part in the study, amounting for 20 people. The couples were recruited via Facebook, responding to ads posted in groups. The recruiting process proved to be challenging because of couples deciding not to take part in the study after initially having agreed. Therefore, the initial sample included 15 couples, with 7 couples dropping out from the study during the first 3 weeks of the study. A second round of recruiting was initiated via the same path - posting ads

regarding the study in Facebook groups. This second round resulted in the recruitment of another four couples - totaling the sample to 10 couples.

There were several requirements that the chosen couples had to match with. The first one was age related - the analysed group of people ranges between 21 and 32 years old. The reason for this is that this is a period of time when people move around due to studies, work and there is a higher tendency to develop long-distance relationships. Another important requirement was that the couples had to be geographically apart at the moment the study was taking place.

The participants range from 21 years old to 32 years old. The median age is 28 years old. And they are located on five continents: Europe, South America, India, Asia and Africa, in the following cities: Stockholm, Paris, Oslo, Torino, Tallinn, Barcelona, New Delhi, Managua, Manilla, Izmir, Istanbul, Johannesburg. Eight of the couples participating in the study met face to face first and then developed a romantic relationship and there are two other couples that met each other online first. The biggest time difference between a couple is eight hours, with one person living in Stockholm and the other one living in Managua; and the second being 6 hours, between Manilla and Stockholm. The reasons for the couples maintaining the relationships at long distance are work related relocations and study related ones, but there are also two couples who have been living in different countries from the start of the relationships. The sample contains a majority of heterosexual couples, only one of them being formed of two women. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the respondents have met in real life for the first time and have developed a romantic relationship before being geographically separated. There are two exceptions - a couple that met online in a chat room, and developed their relationship online during the first after, after which they decided to meet in real life and another couple that met through an online dating service and proceeding to meet in real life after a short time.

In order to address the research questions elaborated in the introductory chapter of the thesis, several methodological instruments were employed. A quantitative content analysis, consisting of a media diary template that each of the participants to the study filled in for the duration of two weeks, every day - a total of 14 days.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis yields better rounded results. Smith notes that “qualitative analysis deals with the forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with duration and frequency of form” (Smith, 1975, p. 218). Further, my study employs the use of perspectives that help bring together methodological tools

such as put forth by Riffe, Lacy, Fico and Watson: “content analysis, alone or in conjunction with other methods and tools, answers theoretical and applied questions explored by journalism or mass communication researchers” (Riffe, Lacy, Fico and Watson, 2019, p.17).

In most cases, the results produced by quantitative analysis are numbers that can be subjected to analysis with the help of different statistical tools, while qualitative analyses manage to offer a more extensive input regarding how informants view the world around them. Bruce Lawrence Berg states that the ideas and opinions of those who create the analysed text “can be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of the study’s results” (Berg, 2001). More than analysing the frequency with which certain patterns reappear, qualitative analysis focuses on the meaning of the researched idea.

Media diaries - quantitative content analysis

One of the definitions of quantitative content analysis states that it is: “the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurements rules, and the analysis of relationship involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption.”(Riffe, Lacy, Fico, 1998, p. 20). In 2019, the same scholars addressed content analysis yet again, stating that “it is often an end in itself, a method used to answer research questions about content” (Riffe, Lacy, Fico and Watson, 2019, p.14).

Even more, the main advantages of this analysis method is that it can work with great amounts of information. Also, the range of research questions that can be researched with the help is basically “limited only by the imagination of those who use such data in their research.” (Holsti, 1969, p.)

In other words, this method can be considered suitable for analyzing media texts and the symbols within those. Therefore, it will be used in the process of analyzing the proposed event of the present research paper. An early definition of this method, coined by Bernard Berelson stated that content analysis is “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952). Later on, Krippendorff addressed the idea of quantitative content analysis, emphasising that it can be used not just with the purpose of describing

a media content, but that it can be used “for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). In the introductory part of “Analyzing media messages using quantitative content analysis in research”, Riff, Lacy and Fico address a more general definition of quantitative content analysis, stating that this is “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (Riff, Lacy, Fico, Riffe & Fico, 2004, page 3). In the case of the present research paper “the rules” according to which information obtained from the media diaries are related to intimacy and its multiple definitions.

But for a better comprehension and analysis of the content analysed within the realms of the present

Name of participant, age, location

Media diary

- A. Date
- B. Time of day of the interaction
- C. Chosen platform (Facebook, WhatsApp, iMessenger, Viber, Snapchat, Instagram, Skype, Any other)
- D. How long does it carry on for?
- E. Is it through text/audio/video?
- F. Did you send photos? Images? Gifs? Emojis?
- G. Do you use more than one platform simultaneously?
- H. Where were you during the interaction?
- I. What topics did you touch upon during the interaction?
- J. Posts on social media that are related to your couple/relationship
- K. Parallel activities (eating, watching TV, sleeping, activities of sexual nature)
- L. Who initiates the interaction?

Date/Day	Time of interaction	Platform	Duration	Audio/Video/Text	Photos/Images/Gifs/Emojis	More than one platform	Location	Topics discussed	SoMe post	Parallel activities	Initiator of interaction

study, it is important to take into account the rapid changes that the technological and media universe has been through in the past decade. In her 2016 “The content analysis guidebook”, Neuendorf discussed about the fickleness of the Internet and addresses the difficulties often encountered when it comes to the capturing, coding and analysis of content shared through media platforms. “Much of this newer content appears in ways that make its analysis and even capture difficult” (Neuendorf, 2016, p.202). A great part of the social media and communication platforms existing nowadays focus on a “live and share the present moment” philosophy that makes the content less tangible, but still not impossible to study with the help of content analysis.

A media diary template, that can be considered a codebook, was developed, in order to spot patterns within the behaviour and habits of long-distance couples and their usage of technology for the creation of intimacy.

Interviews and narrative analysis - qualitative method

There is no single definition for qualitative analysis, but researchers agree that its purpose is mainly to identify patterns and consistencies. Michael Quinn Patton defines this method as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.453). Furthermore, Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon introduce the factor of subjectivity within the process of analysis, defining qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). What these definitions attest to is the fact that qualitative content analysis is not simply a tool that makes it possible to count elements, letters or words, and neither does it guarantee objectivity being employed when analysing content, but rather it allows for the media content to be researched while taking into account circumstances, social contexts and other factors. As being developed mainly within the realm of anthropology, psychology and sociology, qualitative contrast analysis offers the tools necessary to uncover meanings, patterns and ideas that need to be identified, that underlie the media texts.

Content analysis is one of the most popular methods of analysis employed nowadays, being applied in successful ways across a variety of research fields. The qualitative level of analysis is often viewed as complementary to quantitative analysis, trying to fill in the gaps that this type of method can not deal with.

“Interviews provide an opportunity to treat those whose perspectives and experiences we are interested in as knowledgeable, capable and reflective participants in the research process” (Wiles, Rosenberg and Kearns, 2005, p. 90). The same authors address the role played by narrative analysis, mentioning that its main contribution is to “take up the challenge of interpreting and understanding layers of meaning in interview talk and the connection among them” (Wiles, Rosenberg and Kearns, 2005, p. 90). The decision to analyse the conducted interviews through the lease of narrative analysis was taken due to it representing a mode of reasoning, shaping our perceptions of ourselves and impacting our lives, culture and society in general (Berger 1997 and Richardson 1990).

The analysis of the ways in which people choose to talk about their personal experiences and the moments they decide to be open about can represent a pathway into social and spatial practices and everyday experiences. Narrative analysis interprets and tries to offer significance to the often nuanced and not that obvious layers of an interview and connect the dots between those, in order to create a bigger picture and observe emerging patterns.

Catherine Kohler Riessman defines narrative analysis as “the family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a stories form” (Riessman, 2005, p. 1). Narrative interviewing represents a method of qualitative data gathering that allows a story to be woven while it’s being delivered or told throughout an interview.

The chosen method of analysis - interviews, has been disputed at times, with researchers stating that it is difficult to gather relevant information regarding reality and society, because the interviews is nothing but a mere conversation between two people that bring their own versions and constructs of the social world. “The problem with looking at these narratives as representative of some ‘truth’, according to these scholars, is that they are context-specific, invented for the interactive context of the interview, and representative of nothing more or less” (Silverman, 2016, page 52). Nevertheless, there is a strong opposition and there are numerous studies that have been conducted through this type of methodology that attest to the importance and to the knowledge that qualitative interviews are able to bring to the table. David Silverman uses as an argument the fact that qualitative interviews “provide us access to social worlds, as evidence both of ‘what happens’ within them and of how individuals make sense of themselves, their experiences and their place within these social worlds” (Silverman, 2016, page 52). In “People’s Account count: The Sociology of Accounts”, Terri L. Orbuch makes a strong case for employing interviews when conducting a research within the realm of social sciences. Her argument lays in the idea that “accounts and other related concepts, such as stories and narratives, represent ways in which people organise views of themselves, of other and of their social world” (Orbuch, 1997, page 455).

The second part of the methodological analysis employed the qualitative method of interviewing. This part was necessary as to fill in the gaps left by the quantitative analysis, the media diaries, and to add more information regarding the habits and rituals of couples in long-distance relationships, when it comes to technology and using it to create and maintain a feeling of intimacy. A set of questions was put together, that was completed with follow-up questions, in accordance with each participant’s answers and disclosures. Each of the participants was interviewed separately from their partner, totalling a number of 24 interviews. The length of the interviews ranges from 18 minutes to

more close to 1 hour and this factor depends on the openness and participants' willingness to disclose more, to expand more regarding their long-distance relationship and their technology related habits. The interviews took place through Skype or Facebook Messenger, mediated by the video function. All of the discussions were recorded and later on transcribed, so it would be easier to spot patterns and ideas that keep reoccurring throughout the discussions, and later on to analyse their significance for the research question of the present study.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a prepared set of questions that are meant to guide the conversation into the direction of technology and intimacy in long-distance relationships. But there is also place for impromptu questions that might arise as follow-ups to some things the interviewee says and therefore, the format of the conversation takes a more fluid, informal shape, the interviewee being given the freedom to share their story in informal circumstances.

Limitations of the study

The present study might serve as a pilot study for a future research into long-distance couples' habits related to technology and the ways they engage with it and use it to maintain the romantic relationships.

There are several weaknesses when it comes to the present study, one of the main ones being the size of the sample. Ten couples might be too small of a number to reflect universal routines of people involved in long-distance relationships. Surely, a larger sample would fortify the results of the present study, while also bringing in new data and aspects of the routines developed by LDR couples. Another shortcoming to consider are the media diaries that each of the participants was asked to fill in. The participants filled in information related to their communication habits in different manners, some proving to be extremely thorough with the interaction times, locations and other details, while other participants shared minimum information, this discrepancies posing dilemmas when coding the information and making the analysis more difficult

Results and discussion

After gathering the data provided by the participants, the 20 media diaries, several questions related to the quantitative content analysis were raised.

- Is the gender of the initiator of the interaction a valid unit of analysis and does it bring substance to the study, when considering that the research does not rely solely on heterosexual couples?
- How should the time of day of the interaction be viewed and analysed when there is significant time zone difference between the partners of some of the couples?

After completing the round of interviews, several patterns emerged, as observed by the researcher and these are directly connected to questions and topics that were addressed during the interviews.

In order to analyse the results and to offer a conclusion of the study, it is necessary to go back to the research question and to the three sub-questions meant to support it:

The aim of the research is to document and analyze the role of digital media and social media platforms and the ways in which these are used to create and maintain intimacy in relationships between people that are geographically apart.

- 1. What is the role of digital media used by couples in long-distance relationships and how do they use these technologies?**
- 2. How is intimacy defined by people involved in long-distance relationships?**
- 3. How is intimacy created and maintained by couples in long-distance relationships with the help of digital media?**

Therefore, what follows are sub-chapters that deal with and explore topics connected to the theme of the present master thesis: Social Media platforms used, intimacy, specific use of technology and digital media within the realm of romantic relationships, advantages and issues connected to the use of digital media, frequency of communication.

- 1. What is the role of digital media used by couples in long-distance relationships and how do they use these technologies??**

Frequency of mediated interactions

When asked about the frequency of communication with each other, every informant replied that they do it every day and this answer is supported by the quantitative content analysis of the information provided in the media diaries. One of the couples tries to enforce a day off per week from communicating with each other, in order to be able to engage more with their surroundings and another couple has issues with communicating daily due to the nature of one of the partner's job, that implies being at sea with no internet connection.

Communication happens in a fluid way, generally without fixed hours and times for sending texts or calling and it is influenced heavily by events of every day life with one of the subjects mentioning that they try to squeeze in communication whenever they can or have free time.

But there are also exceptions to this rule, with one couple preferring to communicate according to a tacit agreement they've both eased into: *"We talk every day and we normally have a schedule, mostly because there's an 8 hour difference. I talk to him for 5 - 10 minutes when it's morning for me and then we talk again later, when it's morning already for him. We talk a lot, but we try to have time to do our own stuff and then have time to talk to each other, so it's easier with a schedule. It's easy to talk if I'm cooking or I'm on my way to the supermarket, that's easy, but if I'm doing actual work, I can't focus enough"* K, Stockholm

Two of the main factors that have the power to influence how often and when partners communicate are time difference and availability of an Internet connection. For one of the couples involved in the study, Internet connection is not always a possibility, therefore, there are days of complete silence between the two partners: *"According to various operations we undertake, we are not allowed to use any kind of cell phone when we are at sea. They last usually between 11 days to two weeks"* T., Stockholm. When involved in a long-distance relation, days seem to be scattered with messages varying from the most trivial content, with the sole aim of making an attempt at involving the other person in one's life and day to day occurrences, to the more profound conversations. *"We're on the phone all day, everyday. Sometimes people ask us what is there to talk about so much with just one person and we tell them that we talk about everything, every little thing that happens to us. We stop communicating only when we're fighting. Otherwise, we don't stop talking, we just turn the video function on and carry on with our daily lives: homework, cooking, dinner, cleaning."* A., Izmir

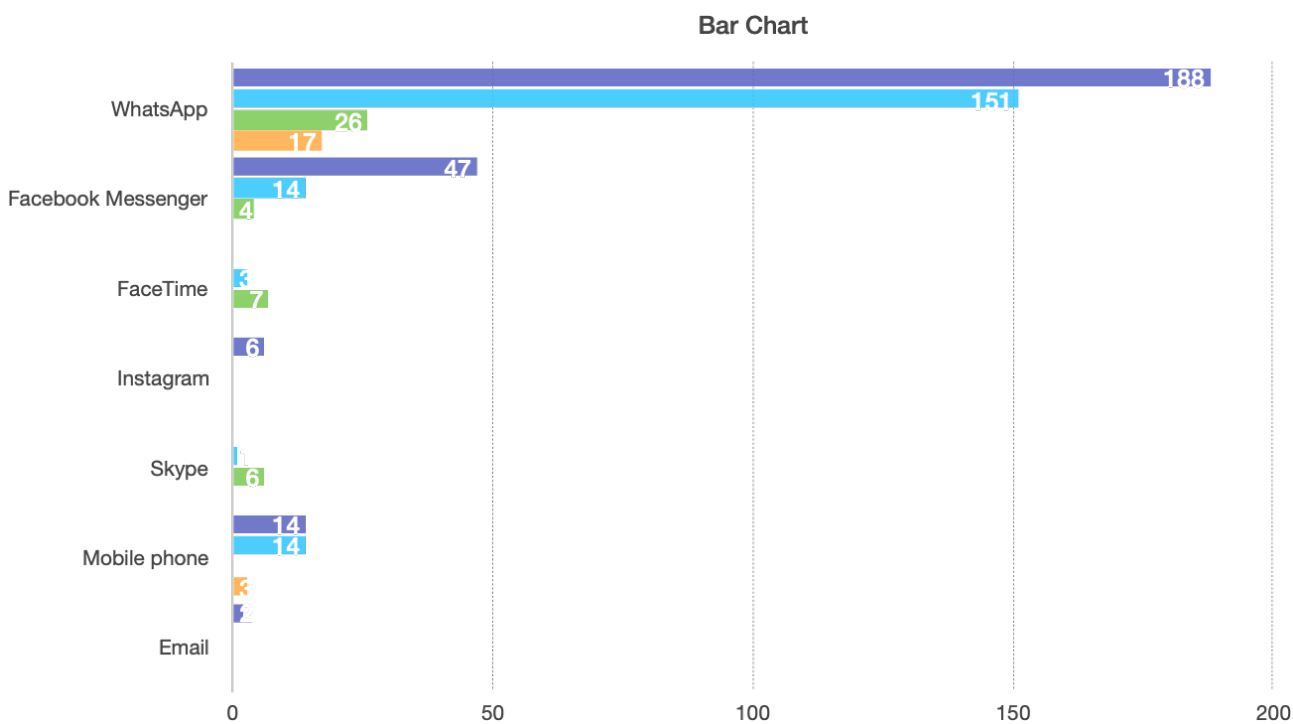
Choice of platform and means of interacting with each other

In order to analyse the way technology and media are used by the participants of the study, it was important to establish which platforms and means of interacting, be it through text, audio, video notes, were used and how. When analysing the results of the content analysis and also during the 20 interviews that were carried on, one of the units of analysis managed to come to the surface very early on and that was the fact that WhatsApp was the most popular platform amongst the participants of the present study, as seen in the tables and bar chart below.

Nine out of the ten couples use WhatsApp to communicate with each other, while Instagram and Facebook Messenger come in second place, each of them being used by three of the couples. *“We mostly use Facebook Messenger; it’s the backbone of our relationship” EJ, Manilla*

Distribution of Social Media platforms by couples

Platform	Number of couples
WhatsApp	9
Facebook Messenger	3
Skype	2
Instagram	3
FaceTime	1



When looking into the total number of interactions and how these were distributed amongst platforms and also amongst means of communication, WhatsApp and texting are on top of the list. Research conducted by SimilarWeb has shown that WhatsApp continues to be the first choice when it comes to communication platform in 104 countries, of the 168 analysed losing a few spots to Facebook Messenger whose use has slightly risen, when compared to the 2016 analysis. The data were collected by analysing Android App Data. There are several reasons for which the instant messaging application that was launched in 2009 and later on acquired by Facebook, has gained such popularity - it is available on several platforms, has PC versions, is considered secure due to its automatic encryption and it is fairly easy to use.

Facebook Messenger comes in second place when looking at the number of interactions, also being used by 3 out of 10 couples. This platform is used mostly to send links, videos, news and to communicate per se. Communication through Messenger and Skype happens mostly when the informants use their laptops, whether they are at home or at work.

Platforms used and choice of interaction

PLATFORM	TEXT	AUDIO	VIDEO	VOICE NOTES
WhatsApp	188	151	26	17
Facebook Messenger	47	14	4	
FaceTime		3	7	
Instagram	6			
Skype		1	6	
Mobile phone	14	14		3
Email	2			

“If I’m at home, I prefer the laptop and we use Skype, but if she is outside we have to use our mobiles and use WhatsApp. Skype is very bad for mobile battery” O., Istanbul.

Some of the participants revealed that they transitioned to WhatsApp from other platforms, the reason behind this change being convenience and the possibility to multitask. *“We used to talk on Skype, using our laptops, but then we switched to WhatsApp and our communication pattern also changed a bit. We have a continuing conversation throughout the day, instead of having one conversation per day, when we focus only on each other, like it used to be on Skype. We would do just that, talk to each other, whereas now we do other things while we’re talking to each other.*

WhatsApp is faster and more convenient to carry on a conversation throughout the entire day.” E., Oslo

During the interviews, a couple revealed that they use mostly WhatsApp “*and maybe sometimes, when that platform isn’t working, we use Facebook Messenger*” K, Stockholm. There are also instances when couples have developed a small routine and migrate between platforms: “*We could be communicating just about all day. Pretty much right. Mostly WhatsApp, like texting all day, but usually at night we FaceTime.*” RJ, Middle East. Or another case when Instagram is used quite a lot: “*No, I would say 90% of communication is through WhatsApp. We use Instagram quite a lot, because I tag him in things. And then we reply to each other. I would say we stay between WhatsApp and Instagram.*” A., Italy

When it comes to Instagram, a platform that developed features such as Direct Messaging, Stories and others during the last few years, has also become quite a popular medium for people to communicate, and the couples that took part in the study are no exception to this, as revealed by the results of the quantitative content analysis and by the interviews: “*The Direct Message function of Instagram - we use it to send each other posts of accounts that we both follow or if there’s something interesting or useful that we find. We don’t chat on there*” EJ, Manilla. The same couple also have created an Instagram account just for the two of them, where they post pictures they like, that remind them of each other and other visuals, considering this private profile as a visual diary of their long distance relationship.

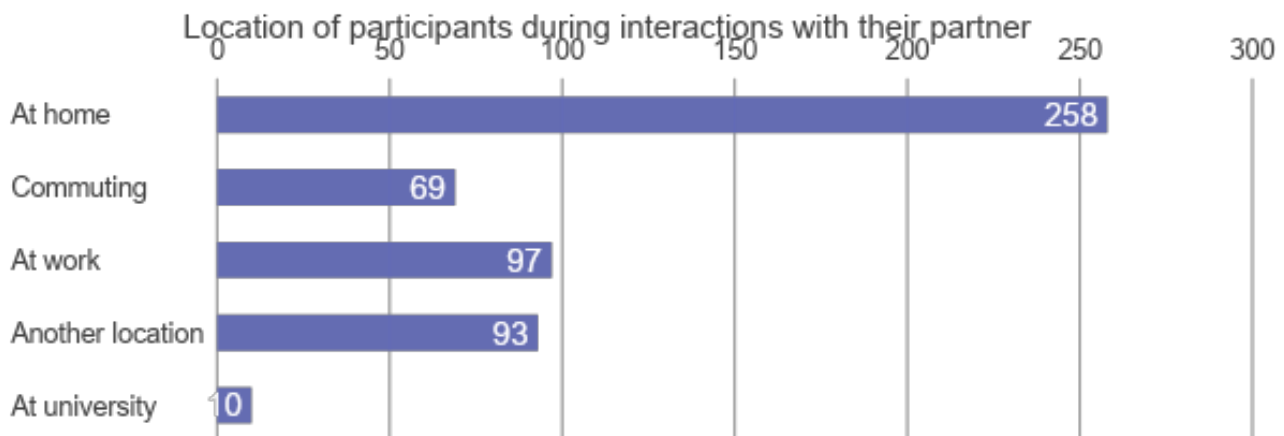
When it comes to means of interacting with each other, texting was the choice in the majority of the analysed interactions, participants explaining during the interviews that it is the easiest way to reach out to the other person, due to schedule incompatibility: “*Sometimes it’s easier to leave texts or voice messages, because our schedules don’t always synchronise*” DD, Stockholm.

Another reason for texting being the preferred means of communication is the sensation of control over ones’ time and the absence of immediacy, of needing to offer a reply straight away, as it happens during audio and video calls. “*I prefer texting because it lets me articulate things better and I can think about what I want to say. And it’s especially helpful when you’re having a fight, because I am not a reactionary person, I need a bit of time to think. So on the phone you don’t have that time for pauses and thinking and you can write back when you know exactly what you’re feeling*” G, Stockholm

And the means of interaction is also chosen in connection with the location of the partners: “*When I’m at work, he sends me a little text and when I leave work and I’m on my commute, I talk to him,*

because that usually takes around 45 minutes. We do have video chats, but not that often, because if I'm doing something or if he's doing something, then it's easier to just have audio" K, Stockholm.

As can be observed in the bar chart, an overwhelming majority of conversations and interactions take place while the partners find themselves in the comfort of their homes, perhaps delimitating in this way their personal lives.



A rather surprising result of this study was the fact that video calls are not carried on very often by couples in long-distance relationships, the reasons behind this choice being of practical nature, for example: *"We tried to do it everyday, but it is not realistic. Sometimes I spend my evenings with friends, sometimes she spends her time with her friends, so there was no time to have a video call"* O., Istanbul. One couple decided to stick to audio calls and texts during weekdays and dedicate time to video calls during the weekends, because that is when they can dedicate full attention to the other person and focus only on the video call. And this is supported by the entries in the media diaries, that account for only 43 of the interactions being through video calls.

An interesting reveal of the analysis is the use of voice notes and it being used by couples in long-distance relationships, the subjects considering to be a good tool, when one is in a rush, but still want to hear each other's voices, as explained by one of the participants *"If we don't have time to talk, if we're in a rush, we send audio messages/voice note"* K, Stockholm. *"We used to leave each other audio messages, especially in the first months when didn't get a chance to talk to each other"* EJ, Stockholm. When analysing the media diaries and the responses given during the interviews, half of the couples taking part in the study, five, send each other voice notes.

The majority of the interviewees said that they use their smartphones to communicate with their partner, with the exception of two participants that stated that they don't own a smartphone, and this is an important finding of this study, because it proves how indispensable and ubiquitous smartphones have become and that detail influences the choice of platforms chosen to interact with their partner, regular calls and text coming into play.

Displaying the relationship on Social Media

During the two weeks when the participants were meant to fill in the media diary, no Social Media post related to their romantic relationship was made. When it comes to posts on Social Media with direct connection to their relationship, this is not a widespread and often used practice, with the majority of the respondents stating that they only post when there are important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries or when they meet face to face, as told by one of the participants: *"We do, especially when there's a milestone, birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's day. We try not to post too much and keep it more to ourselves, but we did it when I proposed, when she had her first marathon, when we graduated. I was very proud when she said "Yes!", so I wanted to share this news"* EJ, Manilla

This might prove to be an interesting result, attesting to the fact that people are trying to separate their personal lives from their online personas, putting a clear boundary between the public and the private, as clearly articulated by one of the informants during the interview: *"I don't use social media to post personal information about myself, I use it to keep in touch with people"* E, Oslo.

When asked about this practice during the interviews, most of the responses gravitated towards the same idea - displaying the relationship on social media is merely a way of trying to show love when there are only a few things that can be done when geographically separated: *"I could post a photo on his birthday or when I miss him. Or when I visit him. I display it because there's just such a limited amount of things that you can do to show love when you're long distance, It makes me feel that his is a way to show some part of your affection and love for that person."* A, Izmir.

An interesting perspective related to the idea of Social Media posts related to the romantic relationship was the fact that it might render it more validity in the eyes of other people as stated by one of the subjects: *"I think in a sense, it doesn't make it stronger between us, but stronger in a weird way and it is a bit odd to recognise that, but sometimes it is a bit frustrating when people don't recognise your relationship as a real one. So in that sense, it gives a sense of external validation when you are posting pictures and showing people that you're together. In a weird way,*

social media exposure makes the relationship stronger in the eyes of others, but not between us.”

A., Italy

One of the more common practices when it comes to romantic relationships and Social Media related activity is the “tagging” of each other in the comments’ section of memes, gifs, videos or other content shared on social media platforms: *“We tag each other in things that remind us of each other or in the comment section of videos with cute dogs, funny memes of our favourite shows”* DD, Stockholm. And this custom of tagging each other can be considered another attempt at creating phatic communication, where the content might not be of substance, but it is rather the connection made with the other person that counts.

“The thing with posting on social media is what you want people to see about you, but sometimes it doesn’t match with your reality. You can post happy pictures, but that doesn’t mean that you’re happy” concludes one of the participants to the study.

2. How is intimacy defined by people involved in long-distance relationships?

“It’s very cliché to say but he is someone I can be myself with, so that’s what I would call intimacy. I don’t have to make an effort to be around him and I think it’s the same for him.” A, Italy

One of the main elements of this thesis is represented by intimacy, what it means, first of all, and how is it created and maintained by people involved in long-distance relationships with the aid of technology and digital media. Because this concept is considered to be multifaceted, it is difficult to grasp and understand how it manifests solely through a quantitative content analysis. Therefore, this part of the study was discussed during the interviews, when every participant was asked what does intimacy represent for them.

Though it can be present in all types of relationships, be those between family members or friends, intimacy is most sought after in romantic relationships an idea confirmed by the informants of this study, with one of them saying that *“it’s a connection you don’t have with someone else. I talk to him a lot and about a lot of things that I wouldn’t normally discuss with my friends. When you’re so far away, it’s a struggle and if I didn’t have his support it would be so hard for me. Physical intimacy is one thing, but if you don’t have that connection, to be able to talk about anything, I don’t think it could work. Because now we’re so far apart, we have only that type of connection and it works”* K, Stockholm

The majority of answers gravitated towards the possibility and idea of being comfortable and completely honest in the presence of another person, with one informant saying that for them this connection means *“trusting someone with intimate details about your life, going to someone when you need help” S., Stockholm.*

As stated in the literature review part, Karen J. Prager views intimacy as a connection in which partners feel safe to talk about personal and private matters and that was specifically mentioned by another participant when referring to her relationship with her boyfriend, defining it as an interaction where it is possible to *“share some kind of personal things that I do not share with other people, maybe some secrets, family things or when we discuss about personal memories. And of course, the sexual part” A., Izmir*

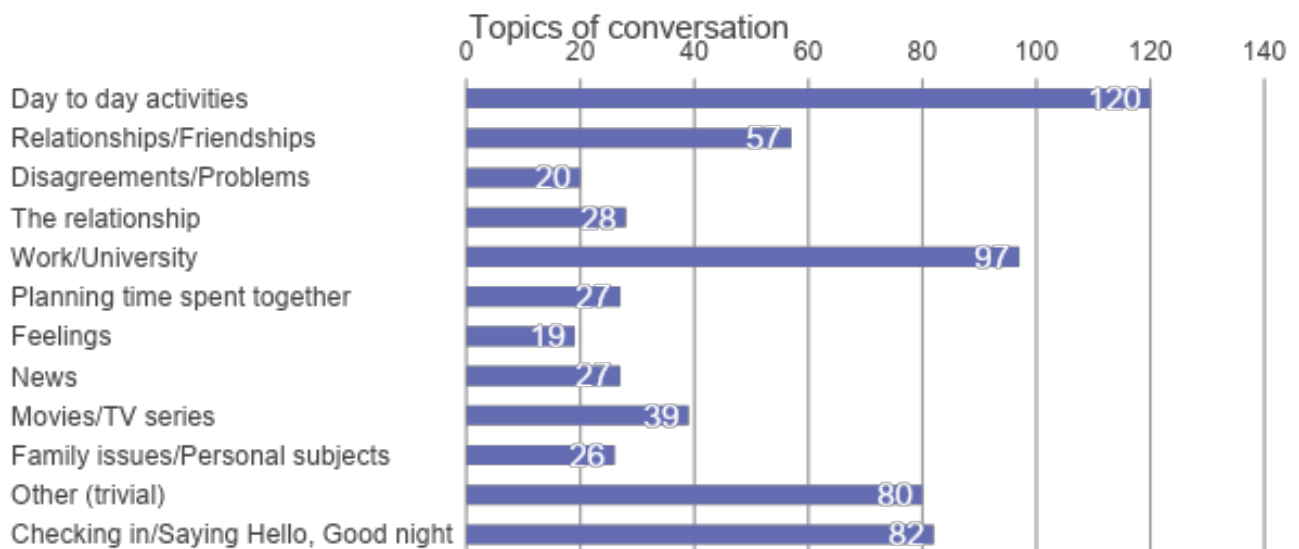
For another couple intimacy is not only about being naked, but more so about managing to *“have good conversation - that’s intimate. Of course, intimacy is more present when we’re together, because there’s the physical element present and it can be about just having coffee in the morning together - these little things.” N, 26 years old, Paris*

Touch and having the other person next to you to kiss and hug and feel their smell are important elements of an intimate relationship that the informants of this study are well aware of and have mentioned when discussing intimacy and defining it as a *“Combination between physical intimacy and there’s also this psychological intimacy, when you share things that might be sensitive. It’s opening up to someone, making yourself vulnerable, talking about topics that you wouldn’t talk to anyone with.” E, Oslo*

One another interesting and vital element of building intimacy in a romantic relationship, advanced by Prager is the idea that it helps both partners grow and understand each other better, a definition that was mentioned during one of the interviews with a participant who stated that for them intimacy represents *“For me it is being able to express yourself in a way that’s only for you and your partner, whether through physical means or through actions. There are different languages of expressing love and the way you speak to your partner, committing to having a nice chat with them, wherever the time or place is important. For me, intimacy is a whole package - it’s when you commit to grow together with someone and the most important element of intimacy for me is communication, being able to work to overcome shortcomings” EJ, Manilla*

3. How is intimacy created and maintained by couples in long-distance relationships with the help of digital media?

“Technology is something that allows us to be together, without actually being together in the same room. You’re together through your phone that you carry everywhere. And it’s easy to send a text or call the other person. So technology is like the third part of our relationship” K, Stockholm



Conducting the interviews and analysing the media diaries has helped pinpoint and establish a few ways through which people who are involved in long-distance relationships try to create this feeling of intimacy together with their partner and also to maintain it with the help of digital media. As pointed out in the literature review and confirmed through the twenty interviews carried out with each of the participants of the study, intimacy tends to be more about “being emotionally intimate, to be able to share feelings, being honest with each other and share feelings and thoughts that we don’t share with other people.” DD, Stockholm. As participants declared that connection is valued by the ability to open up and discuss deeply personal things, while feeling safe with the other person. Therefore, it was important to look into the couples’ conversations, what they discussed and if they chose to share personal things when talking to each other through text, audio or video calls. In order to do that, each participant had to fill in in the media diary a column designated for the topics that were touched upon. Furthermore, during the interviews, each of them was asked about the conversations they have with their partner and whether these tend to touch upon more serious, deeper topics or if these were “saved” for face to face talks. This way, the codebook developed for the quantitative content analysis level of the methodological part of the study contains a unit of analysis that looks into the topics of discussion. After analysing the media diaries, the topics mentioned by the participants were coded and divided into certain categories. The results (seen in

the bar chart below) attest to the fact that people in long distance relationships mostly discuss day to day things on a daily basis.

“Phatic communication”, where content might not be of great value, but the intention of connecting is the one that matters is very much present within long-distance relationships, because it serves as a reminder of the other person’s presence, even at a distance. During one interview, the participant disclosed that the topics that they touch upon depend on the day - *“if it’s a light day we just talk about work and day to day things. But we do also go into deeper issues, sometimes you just want to talk about how sad you are and have deeper conversations. We talk about it, even if it’s talking on the phone. That’s what we have at the moment”* K, Stockholm. It was interesting to discover if screens represent a barrier for the long-distance couples and if they rather wait for a face to face meeting to discuss feelings, personal matters, their relationship, or if these conversations happened even if technologically mediated. According to the replies received with the help of the interviews, only one person out of the twenty said she prefers to have more profound conversations face to face, because of the unpredictability of audio calls she has with her partner when he is away. Another factor that plays probably the most important role when it comes to the couples’ choice of topics of conversations is how often they get to meet in real life, as explained by one of the interviewees: *“we don’t have the opportunity to wait with difficult subjects, so if something happens, we have to talk about it”*, K., Barcelona.

All of the ten couples send each other photos, be those of themselves, of friends, pets, food or any other interesting thing that might strengthen the sensation of being part of each other’s lives. One participant says they choose to exchange pictures with their in order to remind each other of the fact that there are human beings behind the screens and because this way they get to share their personal experiences. *“We send photos of everything - I go out with friends and send photos of them or of my surroundings. If it’s something nice and I feel that it’s a moment I would like to share with him, then I send him a photo, a selfie. And he does the same. When I moved into a new place, I called him on video and showed him all the way to my house, so he knows my surroundings”*, one of the participants told me during the interview, and that stands as testimony and proof of the little bonds that are created through technology that strengthen the emotional connection of a couple. All of the ten couples send photos to each other, but two of them stated that they don’t send photos of a sexual nature because they don’t feel safe with putting that type of information online.

The geographical distances that exist between the partners push them to be more creative in their attempts to be present in each other’s lives, with some of them establishing rituals of having

“Skype-beers”, video calls that could resemble the atmosphere of a date in a bar, drinking beer and conversing with the loved one. But these kinds of rituals are difficult to establish in some cases, due to the time difference between the partners, schedules that are busy with work and/or university courses, social lives and other events of life. Another example is the couple that decided to set up an Instagram account just for the two of them and use it as a digital photo album for the time they were apart.

One of the features of technology that was praised by the majority of participants during the interviews is the fact that it is instant and that it offers the possibility of sharing things, feelings, experiences with their partner when they are happening and one of the participants has emphasised the importance of this feature, by saying that *“the interactions we have when we’re long-distance, they happen in the moment, even if it’s sharing a little bit of daily life, It’s having a bit of me in her life and a bit of her in mine. It can be whatever: my shitty face, what happened at work - little instances that you tend to forget about later. The kind of things that you can share with technology - that definitely makes it easier.”* N, 26 years old, Paris

According to Moss and Schwebel, one of the important components of intimacy is physicality, so one of the things discussed during the interviews was how is this done or replaced when the other person lives in their phones.

The responses varied, with most couples saying that they use technology to send each other texts of sexual substance, an activity known as “sexting” in common parlance and sexy photos.

Furthermore, some of the couples use the audio and the video functions when engaging in activities of a sexual nature while being geographically separated.

For one participant that said that intimacy is very closely linked to the physical aspect of the relationship, sharing pictures of a sexual nature, sexting and using video calls to have sexual encounters is an important part of maintaining the relationship while long distance. *“We will continue doing that, because it’s the only part that’s physical that’s left there. The only thing we can do to keep things exciting and fresh, without turning into just friends”*, added the interviewee. For another participant, blowing kisses while having Skype video calls is also a tiny part of building and maintaining the intimate bond with their partner, because *“it’s the closest best thing one has, in this case media platforms and apps”*.

But not all couples are keen on experiencing that aspect of a relationship in the digital realm and in the case of this study, four out of ten couples stated that they don’t focus on the sexual aspect of the relationship, with one participant explaining that it might feel awkward and that they prefer to wait a bit and *“make it more special. We don’t talk about sex on the phone. It could feel a bit awkward,*

because it is more pure when we see each other. When we lived together, being physical was more boring, more routine. And when you're LDR you can find unique and surprising things again. But it can't be replaced with a phone." M., 25 years old, Barcelona. For another couple, sending sexy pictures and texts has not proven to be a successful formula, so they have decided to try a less traditional set up - *"throughout the years we've had moments when we talked about the need of being physical, especially when we were one year apart and we had moments when we were okay with opening up the relationship. But it is hard, because you're in a relationship and you want to have that kind of intimacy with that person and you can't replace it with technology. There is stuff you can do to try and maintain a sexual life online, but that is not the same things at all"*, the interviewee explains. *"We appreciate more the other type of intimacy, not the physical part"*, says one of the participants, explaining that there is no way to replace it.

On the opposite spectrum, for one of the participants that sends sexy pictures and exchanges texts of sexual nature with their partner, communication mediated through digital media serves as a sort of technological aphrodisiac that manages to add up to the sexual tension and that intensifies the experience and their partner completed the picture by saying that they can tell each other things and makes sure to reply to the partner's images and we can fantasise together through texts, *"but it doesn't lead to something. It's more the anticipation of finally meeting."* E, Oslo.

People in long-distance relationships seem to become more inventive when it comes to keeping the connection with their loved one alive. For example, one of the informants told me that she has made it a habit to send one email everyday to her partner, with something that she found interesting, be it a picture, a link for a video, or anything else that could strengthen the bond. Some participants prefer to step away from technology, with one participant saying that she writes letters to her partners when they are not able to communicate and with another one sending postcards from every new city visited.

When referring to the roles digital media and technology play in their relationship, one of the participants compared it to a plaster used to repair an injury, adding that *"normally you wouldn't prefer to be injured, but if that happens, you need to find ways to cure it"* O., Istanbul. But there is a general consensus that having the chance to maintain a relationship and even make it grow with the help of technology and digital media *"has made it all easier. Otherwise, we would be in the dark"*, S., Stockholm.

One thing that resurfaces throughout media diaries and the conversations carried on with the participants in the study is the fact that even though technology minimises or, in some cases, annuls the physics aspect of a romantic relationship, the partners state that they have grown closer to each other, have become more intimate and, as put into words by one of the interviewees *“have had entire chapters of the relationship unfolded solely”* because of technology and the possibility it offers to have conversations and share things instantaneously, as explained by one of the participants: *“I think we’re still as close as we were, maybe even closer. Sometimes when we were physically together, because we had this comfort, we would also multitask and not focus on each other. But when we have the video calls, we’re very focused on sharing our feelings, our thoughts, our day. So emotionally we’re still able to preserve that bond”* DD, Stockholm.

The analysis of the interviews and media diaries also reveals that for couples in long-distance relationships the medium is not of utmost importance, but the message is and whether it’s delivered online or face-to-face is a secondary detail, because technology and digital media offer the necessary tools and features for an intimate conversation, with the exception of physical touch, that at times, proves to be frustrating. For one of the partners of two couples that started their relationship through an online platform and continued to chat for a year, before meeting in real life, the online interactions carried an intense meaning and that while being together physically the interviewee *“couldn’t wait to get back online, go back to texting, because I was so used to it and it is such a bit part of the relationship. The deeper the real life communication get, more meaningful our texts are”*.

The influence and a role that digital media and mediated communication play on the development and inner workings of romantic relationships are perhaps most noticeable when partners meet each other face to face, after being geographically apart for a time with only two screens between them. *“We continued from the point when we last saw each other. It felt like it had been just one day. Our communication and our relationship were the same. I think I know each step of hers, all her problems, happiness, ups and downs - all of it”*, said one of the participants to the study about the moment when they met after being apart. The idea that media platforms play an important role when it comes to making partners feel intimate faster, when they meet in real life is supported by all participants to the study, because it *“helps keep those feelings flowing”* or for someone *“seeing my partner’s face everyday”* helps them reconnect easier or it helps create *“a continuation of conversations”* they have every day through online media platforms. *“In this day and age, I think it would be kind of impossible to maintain a relationship without technology”* concluded one of the participants.

The main issues and frustrations when it comes to online interactions and communication that is mediated by technology is the fact that things, meanings and emotions can get lost in translation, so to speak and one of the participants confessed that it is not the best way of communicating something profound through texts because *“you miss a lot of parts of the conversation. Sometimes when I write something, she might not get the emotion behind it, even though there are emojis, because it’s just text.”* N., 26 years old, Paris. For other couples, who come from different backgrounds and are not native English speakers, so there are times when it is difficult to make each other understood through texts, *“because when you are face to face you hear the intonation, you can see the other person’s intentions.”* A., Izmir. But above all, when it comes to long-distance relationships and technology, the lack of touch tops the list of issues and is considered *“the most difficult part, you only have it through a screen. You can’t have a hug on a really bad day. And it depends on how committed you are, it can drive you crazy if you don’t trust the other person”* K, Stockholm.

Conclusions

As any other romantic relationship, long-distance ones require work and constant communication, but in this case there is also a third element, like a third team player, and that is technology with its communication platforms. The results of this study have proven that WhatsApp assumes dominance when it comes to communication platforms, the majority of the study’s participants choosing it when interacting with their loved one, a rather interesting aspect to observe. Another relevant result was the fact that texting is the preferred means of communication, this means perhaps that seeing the other person’s face and/or hearing their voice are not necessarily prerequisites of building and nurturing intimacy in a romantic relationship. More so, the rituals of sending a meme, or tagging your loved one in the comments section of a social media posts are considered legitimate signs of affection and connection and prove that perhaps, nurturing intimacy in a long-distance relationship is not always and necessarily a matter of content, but of using technology and media as facilitators to let the other person know that in spite of distance separating you physically, the feeling of closeness is a possibility.

Screens do not impede people in their quest for love, intimacy, human connection, but actually facilitate these bonds to become stronger. In long-distance relationships, the concept of intimacy steps away from the physical element and it is transformed into trust, the freedom to speak one's

mind without fear of judgement and the possibility of sharing even the most personal stories.

Conversations replace rituals and every day doings of geographically challenged couples, this being made possible by the advancements of technology and the idea that their loved one is always within the reach of their fingertips and the tapping of a screen or keyboard.

During the interviews, every informant was asked whether they thought their relationship would be possible to maintain if all the possibilities offered by technology and digital media weren't available. The responses gravitated towards the idea that would be extremely difficult and the majority of the informants said that they would give up on the relationships. This speaks volumes of how much people have internalized the need for technology in everyday life and what an important role digital media are playing when maintaining human connections. Based on the data gathered from the informants - hope and technology are the two crucial elements that allow relationships not only to grow, but to be maintained alive.

The possibility of maintaining a relationship that is mediated by technology makes some people feel more in control over their time and decisions, taking away the immediacy factor and the necessity of replying on the spot. But this is a two faceted effect, because while we are under the impression that we have control over our time and actions, technology can also create the idea of around the clock availability, with one participant confessing that her partner wakes her up in the evenings. Technology gives the impression that the other person is always available, when perhaps they are not really. The sensation that the person is always there, that you can always message them and they will always be able to pick up a call and answer a text is something that can frustrate people involved in long-distance relationships because it might feel that there is this pressure of constant availability.

Technology and digital media allow for the creation of a safe space between the partners of a geographically challenged couple, that allows those to focus on their personal growth and separate lives, while also creating and sharing a digital space that belongs just to them, such examples can be considered the emails that one of the participants sends to their partner, the Instagram profile where a couple posts photos that would serve as souvenirs from the time the relationship was maintained at long-distance, the Skype beer-dates that another couple organizes from time to time or the digital book of memories and screenshots one of the informants created for their better half. Perhaps it is safe to state that people adapt to whatever circumstances they are faced with, finding creative ways to be intimate through texts, pictures, phone or video calls.

In "Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy", Mitchell Hobbs, Stephen Owen, Livia Gerber analyse the ways in which intimate encounters were

changed by the rise and evolution of dating applications, available at any place, at any time, just with the help of our phones. Perhaps the present study might be a step forward for diving deeper into the intricate and at times, complicated world where intimacy intersects with technology, two things that might seem incompatible at first sight; and opening up a wider discussion about digital intimacy, its characteristics, how it is built and maintained and to acknowledge its importance in today's society. Intimacy is an innate need, that people will seek after and create in spite of hurdles or complications, at times even turning technology to their advantage and using it as a third player of a romantic relationship.

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Annexes

In order to carry on the quantitative content analysis, it was necessary to establish a codebook for identifying and defining the variables extracted from the data offered with the help of the media diaries.

CODEBOOK

Unites of analysis	Definition
Time of interaction	The time of day when the interaction took place. This unit of analysis might result tricky due to the time difference when it comes to some of the couples.
Platform	Any type of Communication/ Media platform chosen to conduct the interaction
Type of interaction	Text/Audio/Video
Frequency	How often do the partners/ couples interact per day
Duration	How long does the audio/video call last
Location	Where were the subjects located when they took the call/text
SoMe post	Any type of Social Media posts related to their romantic relationship
Topic	What was discussed during the conversation text, can be considered as the central idea of the conversation

Media diaries

Example 1

Name of participant, age, location

EJ, 31, Philippines

Date/ Day	Time of interaction	Platform	Duration	Audio / Video /Text	Photos/ Images/Gifs/Emojis	More than one platform	Location	Topics discussed	SoMe post	Parallel activities	Initiator of interaction
1 Apr 2019	1:05 pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text	A few emojis	NA	Office	Work	NA	Work	DD
1 Apr 2019	7:19pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text	A few emojis, a lot of GIFs	NA	Driving Home	Career and Future	NA	DD-Work EJ-Driving	DD
1 Apr 2019	9:37pm	FB Messenger	15 minutes	Audio		NA	Home	Work, Career and Future	NA	DD-Work EJ-About to sleep	DD
2 Apr 2019	4:38am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text		NA	Home	Visa application	NA	DD-Home EJ-Sleeping	DD
2 Apr 2019	6:23am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text		NA	Home	Personal News	NA	DD-Sleeping EJ-Prepping for work	EJ
2 Apr 2019	12:58pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Sharing some memes and videos	NA	Office	Catch up	NA	DD-Prepping for work EJ-Work	DD
2 Apr 2019	1:05pm	Whats App	A few exchanges	Text	Shared some photos	NA	Office	Career	NA	Work	EJ
2 Apr 2019	4:42pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text		NA	Office	Video	NA	Work	DD
2 Apr 2019	9:30pm	FB Messenger	10 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Check in	NA	DD-Work EJ-Home	EJ
2 Apr 2019	11:38pm	FB Messenger	15 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Goodnight	NA	DD-Work EJ-About to Sleep	EJ

3 Apr 2019	4:39am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text		NA	Home	Goodnight	NA	DD-Home EJ-Sleeping	DD
3 Apr 2019	6:24am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text	GIFs, memes	NA	Home	Goodmorning	NA	DD-Sleeping EJ-Home	EJ
3 Apr 2019	1:31pm	FB Messenger		Text		NA	Office	Goodmorning	NA	DD-Home EJ-Work	DD
3 Apr 2019	1:47pm	FB Messenger		Text		NA	Office	Catch up	NA	DD-Commute EJ-Work	DD
3 Apr 2019	6:31pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges in a span of half a day	Text		NA	Car	Catch up	NA	DD-Work EJ-Driving	DD
3 Apr 2019	7:17pm	FB Messenger		Text		NA	Car	Venting	NA	DD-Work EJ-Driving	DD
3 Apr 2019	11:16pm	FB Messenger	15 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Catch up	NA	DD-Commute EJ-Home	DD
4 Apr 2019	3:51am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges throughout the day	Text	GIFs, memes	NA	Home	Goodnight	NA	DD-Home EJ-Sleeping	DD
4 Apr 2019	7:18am	FB Messenger	1 hour	Call		NA	Home	Goodmorning	NA	DD-Sleeping EJ-Home	EJ
4 Apr 2019	12:40pm	FB Messenger	35 minutes	Call		NA	Office	Goodmorning	NA	DD-Home EJ-Work	EJ
4 Apr 2019	2:15pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges until the rest of the day	Text and Call	Photos	NA	Office	Catch up & Request	NA	DD-Home EJ-Work	DD

4 Apr 2019	11:33pm	FB Messenger	45 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Goodnight	NA	DD-Work EJ-Home	EJ
5 Apr 2019	3:46pm	FB Messenger	20 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Goodnight	NA	DD-Home EJ-Sleeping	DD
5 Apr 2019	4:25am	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Photos, screenshots	NA	Home	Catch up	NA	DD-Home EJ-Home	DD
5 Apr 2019	12:44pm	FB Messenger	2 minutes	Call		NA	Office	Goodmorning & Request	NA	DD-Home EJ-Work	DD
5 Apr 2019	6:54pm	FB Messenger	A few messages	Text		NA	Office	Updates	NA	DD-Work EJ-Work	DD
5 Apr 2019	11:28pm	FB Messenger	A few exchanges	Text		NA	Home	Catch up	NA	DD-Commute EJ-Home	EJ
6 Apr 2019	3:10am	FB Messenger	2 minutes	Call		NA	Home	Catch up	NA	DD-traveling EJ-Home	DD
6 Apr	11:54pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			In transit	Catch up		EJ: Driving DD: Commuting	EJ
7 Apr	6:33pm	FB messenger	17 minutes	Vide o call			In transit	Hangin g out		EJ: Watchin g a movie at home DD: superm arket errand	DD
7 Apr	10:59pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Photo s, mem es		Home	Catch up		DD: Filling out this media diary EJ: Out with friends	EJ

8 Apr	12:34pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Good morning Catch up		DD: Preparing to go to work EJ: work	EJ
8 Apr	8:19pm	FB messenger	6 minutes	Call			Office	Catch up		DD: Working EJ: Going home	EJ
9 Apr	2:54am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Videos		Home	Good night		DD: Going to sleep EJ: Sleeping	DD
9 Apr	9:17am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Catch up		DD: Sleeping	EJ
9 Apr	9:49pm	FB messenger	12 minutes	Call			Office	Just to say hello		DD: Working EJ: Hanging out with friends	DD
9 Apr	10:38pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Photos		Office	DD sharing about her work		DD: Working EJ: Going home	EJ
10 Apr	1:25am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Catch up		DD: Getting ready to have dinner EJ: Playing games	DD
10 Apr	11:02am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Good morning		DD: Getting ready for work EJ: Working	EJ
10 Apr	5:31pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Office	Visa application update		DD: Working EJ: Working	DD

10 Apr	11:01pm	FB messenger	21 minutes	Video call			In transit	Updates Catch up		DD: Going home EJ: Getting ready to sleep	DD
11 Apr	11:05am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Catch up		DD: Getting ready for work EJ: Working	EJ
11 Apr	9:33pm	FB messenger	34 minutes	Video call			Office	Good night		DD: Working EJ: About to sleep	EJ
12 Apr	6:21am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Getting errand instructions from DD		DD: About to sleep EJ: Sleeping	DD
12 Apr	1:39pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	A few emojis		In transit	Good Morning DD's errand update		DD: Going to work EJ: Working	DD
12 Apr	9:34pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	A few emojis, a lot of GIFs		Office	Catch up		DD: Working EJ: At home	DD
13 Apr	10:09am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Audio			Home	Good morning		DD: About to sleep EJ: Starting his day	EJ
13 Apr	3:16pm	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text			Home	Catch up		DD: Just woke up EJ: Home	DD
13 Apr	6:45pm	FB messenger	21 minutes	Text			In transit	Catch up		DD: Getting ready to go out EJ: Getting ready to go to a party	DD

14 Apr	2:54am	FB messenger	A few exchanges	Text	Sharing some memes and videos		Home	Catch up		DD: Netflix EJ: Getting ready to sleep	EJ
14 Apr	4:54pm	FB messenger	34 minutes	Text	Shared some photos		Home	Video called DD to catch up with common friends		DD: Just woke up EJ: Out with our common friends	EJ

Example 2

Name of participant, age, location

N, 26, New Delhi

Date/Day	Time of Interaction (IST)	Platform	Duration	Audio/Video/Text	Photos / Images /Gifs/ Emojis	More than one platform	Location	Topics discussed	SoMe post	Parallel activities	Initiator of interaction
22 nd April	1:00 pm	Whats App	2 hours	Text	Photos	No	Office	Current affairs, politics, relationship	No	Eating lunch	Nina
22 nd April	8:30 pm	Instagram	10mins	Text	Images	-	Home	Memes	Shared memes on Instagram	Cooking Dinner	Nitin

23 rd April	10:30 am	Whats app	7 hours (on and off)	Text	Image s	No	Office	Room mates life, relatio nship, work progr ess, health	No	Openi ng Lapto p, gettin g coffee	Nina
23 rd April	4:30 pm	Instag ram	10min s	Text	Image	No	Office	Game of Thron es	Meme	Worki ng	Nitin
23 rd April	11:30 pm	Email	20min s	Text	Image	No	Home	Starde w Valley video game	Screen shot	In bed, makin g list of to- dos	Nina
23 rd April	12:30 pm	Whats app	2hour s	Text	Image s	Yes	Home	Room mate Gossi p	Screen shots of meme s relate d to conve rsatio n	Nothi ng- was in bed, ready to go to bed	Nitin
24 th April	11:00 am	Whats app	2 hours	Text	Image s		Office	Love and long distan ce woes.	No	Smok e break	Nina
24 th April	5:00 pm	Whats app Call	10 mins	Audio	NA	No	Office	Love, news about famil y and room mates	No	Wrap ping up from work	Nitin

24 th April	5:30 pm	Whats app	3 hour	Text	No	No	Outsi de office	Surve y progr ess and job oppor tunitie s	No	Booki ng Cab	Nina
24 th April	9:30 pm	Whats app Call	35 mins	Audio	NA	No	Home	Catch ing up on daily news, friend s, planni ng to watch somet hing online togeth er, makin g fun of each other	No	Loun ging in bed	Nitin
24 th April	11:20 pm	Whats app	5 hours	Text	Pictur es, video	Yes	Home	Postc ard from ex- girlfri end, video from cousi n sister, old pictur es	No	None	Nitin

24 th April	11:40 pm	Email	5 mins	Text	Video link	Yes	Home	Old times, song that brings back memo ries	No	Painti ng	Nitin
25 th April	8:00 pm	Whats app	1 hour	Text	Pictur es	Yes	Home	Pictur es, loving messa ges	No	Eatin g dinner	Nitin
25 th April	9:15 pm	Whats app Call	16 minut es	Audio	NA	Yes	Home	Talkin g about ice cream , daily updat es	No	Sittin g in room – taking a break from cleani ng	Nina
25 th April	9:30 pm	Instag ram	5mins	Text	Pictur es	Yes	Home	Game of throne s, jokes	Meme s	Watch ing Netfli x	Nitin
26 th April	1:30 pm	Whats app	5hour s	Text	Pictur es, video gifs	No	Home	Dogs, co- worki ng space s	No	Readi ng in bed	Nitin
26 th April	5:45 pm	Whats app Call	3 mins	Audio	NA	No	Uber	Updat e on day, new place of work	No	None	Nitin

26 th April	8:30 pm	Whats app	3 hours	Text	Pictur es	No	Home	Neph ew pictur es	No	Washi ng face, chang ing – gettin g ready to read in bed	Nitin
26 th April	11:30 pm	Whats app Call	8 mins	Audio	NA	No	Home	Sayin g goodn ight, catchi ng up on day	No	Illustr ating	Nina
27 th April	12:50 pm	Whats app	3 hours	Text	Pictur es	No	Office	Good morni ng, selfies , plans of the day, Game of Thron es	No	Worki ng	Nina
27 th April	5:30 pm	Whats app	30min s	Text	Pics, Video	No	Uber	Morta l Komb at, watch togeth er websi te	No	Travel ling back from work	Nina
27 th April	6:00 pm	Whats app Video	9mins	Video	No	No	Home	Daily affairs , love, roman ce	No	Lying aroun d	Nina

27 th April	1:20 am	Whats app	2 mins	Text	Image s	No	Home	Meeti ng my friend s in Delhi	No	In bed	Nina
28 th April	12:30 pm	Whats app	1 hour	Text	Image s, gifs	No	Parent s home	Plans to watch aveng ers, room mate news	No	Nothi ng	Nitin
28 th April	6:30 pm	Whats app	2 hours	Text	Image s, youtu be links, selfies	No	Dwar ka, Parent s home	Recip es for lunch, aveng ers, Game of Thron es	No	Out for a walk	Nina
29 th April	10:30 am	Whats app	4 hours	Text	Selfie s	No	Uber and Office	Game of Thron es, Aveng ers, Landl ady news, the differ ences of living abroa d	No	Travel ling to work and then settin g up work for the day	Nina

29 th April	5:00 pm	Whats app	5 hours	Text	Images	No	Office	Baguettes, food, recipes, friends, podcast	No	Winding up work desk	Nitin
29 th April	10:30 pm	Whats app Call	1 hour	Audio	No	Yes	Home	Game of Thrones, Reddit, plot holes	No	None	Nina
29 th April	11:15 pm	Instagram	1 hour	Text	Images, gifs	No	Home	Game of Thrones	Memes	None	Nitin
30 th April	6:30 pm	Whats app	5pm,	Text	Selfies	No	Home	Internship news	No	Watering plants	Nitin
30 th April	8:05 pm	Whats app Call	10mins	Audio	No	No	Home	Internship news, daily affairs, summer vacations	No	Eating dinner	Nitin
30 th April	8:15 pm	Whats app Video Call	4 mins	Video	No	No	Home	Relationship Talk, Travel	No	None – break from studying	Nitin
30 th April	9:00 pm	Instagram	2 hours	Text	Images	No	Home	Humor	Memes	Watching netflix	Nitin

1 st May	12:30 pm	Whats app	35mins	Text	Selfies	No	Home	Plans for the day	No	Reading	Nina
1 st May	4:30 pm	Whats app	1.5hours	Text	Food pics, selfie gifs	No	Office	Food, lunch plans, recipes, work news, old college friends	No	Working	Nina
1 st May	6:45 pm	Instagram	1 hour	Text	Dog pic	No	Vasant Kunk	Humour	No	Out for a walk	Nina
1 st May	9:00 pm	Whats app	3 hours	Text	Gifs, screenshots, pics, videos	No	Home	Taylor Swift, Karaoke, Plan with friends, Swedish bonfire festival	No	Eating dinner, writing assignments for college	Nitin
1 st May	12:30 am	Whats app Video Call	20mins	Video	No	No	Home	Food and dessert	No	None	Nina
2 nd May	10:10 am	Whats app	3hours	Text	Selfies	No	Uber	Plans for the day, travel plans	No	Traveling to work	Nina

2 nd May	7:00 pm	Whats app	10mins	Text	Picture	No	Home	Cute picture of my nephew	No	Lying in bed	Nitin
2 nd May	11:30 pm	Whats app	1.5hours	Text	Selfies	No	Home	Game of Thrones	No	Working on assignments	Nitin
3 rd May	12:10 pm	Whats app	10min	Text	No	No	Office	Good morning, responding to previous day's text	No	Sending emails	Nina
3 rd May	4:20 pm	Whats app Call	4mins	Audio	No	No	Office	Travel plans to Sweden and summer break plans	No	At work, finished meeting with Boss	Nina
3 rd May	7:50 pm	Whats app	5.20pm	Text	Images	No	Home	School news	No	Preparing dinner	Nitin

Example 3

Name of participant, age, location

E, 29, Oslo

Date/Day	Time of interaction	Platform	Duration	Audio/Video/Text	Photos / Images /Gifs/ Emojis	More than one platform	Location	Topics discussed	SoMe post	Parallel activities	Initiator of interaction
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23.05.19 Thursday	08:00 – 22:00	Mobile	14h	Text	Image, photos, gifs		Work, home	Work, pop culture, Eurovision, integration, plans for get together, politics		Public transport, work, cooking, watching video	Tatjana
24.05.19 Friday	07:10 – 23:25	Mobile		Text, audio	gifs, photos		Work, home	Politics, work, vacation plans, music, social interactions, real estate		Public transport, work, computer gaming.	Emil
25.05.19 Saturday	13:14 – 01:55			Text, Audio, videos	Photos, Images, gifs		Home, outside	Fashion, Refund, Economy, food, pets, Get together, politics		Gaming, Netflix	Emil

26.05.19 Sunday	09:56 – 21:06	Mobile		Text, Audio, Video	Images, Photos, Audio		Home, Outside, store	Dreams, Real estate, Weather, Renovations, Politics		Gaming, netflix	Tatjana
27.05.19 Monday	08:58 – 22:09	Mobile		Text, audio	Photos, images		Work, Home	Vacation plans, get together plans, work, politics, real estate		Gaming, work, netflix	Emil
28.05.19 Tuesday	08:52 – 21:01	Mobile		Text, Audio, video	Photos, Gifs		Work, home	Work, vacation plans, Real estate, Candy, Schedules,		Work, gaming	Tatjana
29.05.19 Wednesday	06:50 – 21:41	Mobile		Text, Audio	Photos, images, Gifs		Work, public transport, Home	Gambling, Climate, Get together plans, candy, food,		Work, watching videos	Tatjana
30.05.19 Thursday	05:23 – 09:15	Mobile		Text	Photos, pictures,		Home, public transport, Airport	Plans for meeting, travel		traveling	Tatjana

31.05. 19 Friday											
01.06. 19 Saturday											
02.06. 19 Sunday	17:37 – 02:49	Mobil e		Text	Photo s, image s, Video ,		Airpo rt, plane, public transp ort, home	Pet passed away, animal ethics		Travel ing, home	Emil
03.06. 19 Monday	06:58 – 22:42	Mobil e		Text, Audio	gifs, image s		Work, home, public transp ort	Work, cat passed away, get togeth er plans, orderi ng tickets		Work,	Emil
04.06. 19 Tuesday	07:29 – 21:51	Mobil e		Text, audio, video	photo s, image s,		Work, home, public transp ort	Furnit ure, renova tions, politic s, Eurovi sion, cat passed away,		Work, Cooki ng, Netfli x,	Tatjan a

05.06.19 Wednesday	06:55 – 23:59	Mobile		Text, audio, video	Photos, images,		Work, home, public transport,	Comparison of countries, Work, technical support, Language		Work, cooking, netflix	Emil
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Example 4

Name of participant, age, location

A, 21, Izmir

Date/Day	Time of interaction	Platform	Duration	Audio/Video/Text	Photos/Images/Gifs/Emojis	More than one platform	Location	Topics discussed	So Me post	Parallel activities	Initiator of interaction
24.04.2019	10:47	Whats App	2 hours	Text	1 Photo of the train panel schedule	No	At work	Work, plans for the day, gym, Beyonce new documentary, Mambe being late to work	No	No	Ana
	11:52	Facebook Messenger	1 hour	Text	No	No	At work	Mambe being late to work, me missing him, Mambe visiting me in the near future	No	No	Mambe
	14:39	Whats app	2 hours	Text	Screenshots of our earlier conversations	No	At work	That Mambe didn't tell me his work schedule changed and I didn't know, so we had a misunderstanding caused by that	no	no	Mambe

	16:36	Whats app	56 minutes	Video	No	No	At work	Same as by message	no	no	Ana
	17:22	Whats app	1 and a half hour	Text	1 photo making an ugly face, 1 sexy of my body	No	At work	My body shape, my ovaries hurting,	no	no	Ana
	20:36	Whats app	3 and a half hours	Text	Mambe's profile photo	Instagram	My friend's house, on my way home and in my home	Me cooking sushi, Easter, his ugly profile picture, me complaining that he archived our photos on insta and wouldn't bring them back	No	No	Ana
	23:55	Whats app	1 and a half minute	Video	No	No	While walking home	Me complaining about him archiving the photos on insta	No	No	Ana
25.04.2019	10:40	Whats App	45 minutes	text	No	No	On my way to the gym	Wishing each other a nice day before Mambe starts work	No	No	Mambe
	10:53	Whats App	3 minutes	Video	No	No	Before entering the gym	Wishing each other nice day	No	No	Ana
	15:00	Whats App	50 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way from uni to work	Us being tired	No	No	Ana
	16:17	Whats App	9 minutes	Video	No	No	At work		No	No	Ana

	20:30	Whats App	1 hour	Text	No	No	In the shopping mall and in the cinema	About where I am, what is he gonna eat, what movie I will watch and what he will do in the evening	No	No	Ana
	12:48	Whats App	45 minutes	Text	No	No	My friend's house	About the avangers movie and wishing good night	No	No	Ana
26.04.2019	11:14	Whats App	30 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way to university	Good morning greetings	No	No	Ana
	11:58	Facebook Messenger	30 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way to uni	About Mambe always being late everywhere	No	No	Ana
	15:00	Facebook Messenger	15 minutes	Text	Yes, of me making an ugly face	No	In Uni	Me asking is he finished his job	No	No	Ana
	16:00	Whats App	One hour	Text	No	No	In uni	About his job and my school	No	No	Ana
	17:19	Facebook Messenger	One hour	Text	No	No	On my way home	About me being tired from school, about the first time we had intimacy and laughing about it	No	No	Mambe
	21:49	Facebook Messenger	10 minutes	Text	No	No	At the dinner with my boss	About his football game	No	No	Mambe
	10:06	Whats App	3 hours	Text	Screenshots of his friend photos	No		About my evening, his football game, his friend from Tunisia,	No	No	Mambe

	12:12	Whats App	40 minutes	Video	no	No	In bed	About our day, plans for the next day, families	No	No	Mambe
27.04.2019	14:23	Whats App	2 hours	Text	Endgame photo, photo of the friend he spoke to, screenshots of their convo, a photo of me raising my eyebrow like "bitch what" :D	No	Outside with my guests, in the office, outside with my friend	About why I was not online before this hour, about him going for a movie with his friend, about him speaking to an old friend and me thinking its weird first thing she asked if were dating, about my work,	No	No	Mambe
	16:56	Whats App	30 minutes	Text	No	No	Outside with my friend Muge	About my friend Muge	No	No	Mambe
	18:39	Whats App	One and a half hour	Text	Photo of me and my friend freezing at the beach, a video of a nasty plate number of a car in front of us. Photos of engagement rings	No	At the beach, in the car, in the mall	About his friend with who he s going for movies, about people being very busy in Paris	No	No	Ana
	20:07	Facebook Messenger	One and a half hour	Text	Photo of the new book I got	No	At the mall, on my way home	About diamond proposals rings, and that he wouldn't plan to buy me a diamond ring, about how expensive cinema tickets are in France	No	No	Mambe

28.04.2019	01:09	Facebook Messenger	One hour	Text	About my outfit at the party 1 hour earlier	Instagram	At home	About him not liking endgame and about me making fun we shouldn't date, about what I did in the evening, about me being jealous at his friend,	No	No	Mambe
	01:56	Facebook Messenger	8 minutes	Video	No	No	In bed	About his time at the movie and my time at the party	No	No	Ana
	02:12	Whats App	20 minutes	Text		No	In bed	About how long the movie lasted, about how much I love him	No	No	Ana
	13:00	Whats App	5 hours but on and off with 15-20 minutes break between messages, sometimes 2-3 minutes	Text	Of me and my friend Muge	No	In the car, at the beach, in bowling	About how we slept, we argued about him not replying to my messages, about my friend leaving, and me being there	No	No	Ana
	18:58	Facebook Messenger	Three and a half hours on and off with 10-15 minutes break	Text	Cat photo	No	My friends house	About me in my friends house, and their cat	No	No	Mambe
29.04.2019	11:12	Whats App	5 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	Good morning	No	No	Ana
	15:29	Facebook Message	One hour	Text	No	No	At work	About how his work was, and him going to a friend house	No	No	Mambe

	16:29	Whats App	40 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	Him eating, and being tired	No	No	Mambe
	17:10	Whats App	12 minutes	Call	No	No	At work	About this diary, argued about Mambe not being interested in teaching me french	No	No	Mambe
30.04.2019	11:40	Messenger	20 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way to school	Wishing each other good day	No	No	Mambe
	15:16	Message	2 and a half hours	Text	Photo of Mambe, of his aunt, of his cousins	Instagram	In school	About Mambe's aunt, her kids, what he ate in their house	No	No	Mambe
	22:10	Whats App	1 hour	Video Call	No	No	Home	About our day	No	No	Ana
01.05.2019	10:20	Whats App	1 hour	Text	No	No	At work	About why he wasn't online in the evening	No	No	Ana
	18:00	Whats App	1 hour 13 minutes	Text	No	No	At home	About when Mambe is gonna come visit me	No	No	Ana
	21:41	Whats App	1 and a half hour	Text	Meme's, photo of his bike,	No	At home	About whats app account features, about working hard, Barcelona match,	No	No	Ana
	23:11	Whats App	20 minutes	Video Call	No	No	At home		No	No	Mambe
02.05.2019	10:30	Whats App	5 minutes	Audio Call	No	No	On my way to the gym	Trying to wake Mambe up	No	No	Ana

	10:35	Whats App	30 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way to the gym	About the plans for the day	No	No	Mambe
	13:27	Whats App	1 hour	Text (with breaks of 5 minutes between messages)	No	No	In School	About his internship	No	No	Mambe
	16:03	Whats App	40 minutes	Text (with breaks of 5 minutes between messages)	No	No	On my way to work	About the cultural festival in my school	No	No	Mambe
	18:05	Whats App	3 minutes	Call	No	No	At work	Waking him up	No	No	Ana
	18:09	Whats App	5 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	About me woking a lot	No	No	Ana
	19:23	Whats App	2 hours	Text	Of the garden where I work	No	At work	Mambe fell asleep, about his dream, about his GPA, evening plans, whether we love each other or not, the problems we have and why, about my temper, about people changing	No	No	Mambe
	21:48	Whats App	One hour	Text	Photo of Mc Donalds	No	My friend house	What he is cooking and what I ate	No	No	Mambe
03.05.2019	10:38	Whats App	56 seconds	Call	No	No	Home	Waking Mmabe up	No	No	Ana

	11:49	Whats App	4 hours	Text	No	No	At work	Wishing good morning, checking place tickets for Mambe, his brother, all the possible variations, about my family issues	No	No	Ana
	16:23	Whats App	15 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	About what he is doing in school	No	No	Ana
	16:39	Messenger	1 and a half hour	Text	No	No	On my way home	About a video I sent him, about how will he support his kids, and what kind of dad he wants to be, about my French bourse, and his friend who is calling	No	No	Ana
	18:13	Messenger	6 min	Audio Call	No	No	On my way o french course	About his friend, about our day in general	No	No	Ana
	18:28	Messenger	20 minutes	Text	No	No	In the french course	About my professor and how he teaches	No	No	Ana
	20:29	Whats app	20 mnutess	Text	Food photo,	No	In the french course	About how my french course is going	No	No	Mambe

	21:20	Whats App	4 hours	Text	Photo of my house location	No	Outside	About how the class passed, about me being excited, me meeting my friends, about Mmabe going to sleep early, about my friend Masha and her cooking, about transportation from airport, location of my home	No	No	Ana
04.05.2019	00:26	Whats App	23 minutes	Video	No	No	At home	About him coming to Antalya	No	No	Mambe
	10:07	Whats App	5 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	Wishing good morning	No	No	Ana
	10:12	Messenger	20 minutes	Text	No	No	At work	About mambe's game,	No	No	Ana
	12:44	Messenger	2 hours	Text (on and off)	No	No	At work	The game they won, about plans after	No	No	Mambe
	14:51	Whats App	40 minutes	Text	My friend mother	No	At work	Mambe being late for the second mathc	No	No	Mambe
	17:36	Whats App	1 hour	Text	Food	No	With my friends in my house	About the conversation with my uncle, my graduation,	No	No	Mambe

	20:11	Whats App	3 hours	Text	No	No	Home	About my time with my friends, about the TV series he is whatching, Liverpool match, him doing his internship in Turkey	No	No	Ana
	23:01	Whats App	27 minutes	Video Call	No	No	Home	About him doing his internship in Turkey and the misunderstanding	No	No	Ana
05.05.2019	13:06	Whats App	3 miutes	Text	No	No	Home	Why he called me at night	No	No	Ana
	21:58	Whats Appq	4 hours	Text	No	No	Home	Congratulating Mambe with Ramadan, arguing about yesterday	No	No	Ana
06.05.2019	23:55	Whats App	2 minutes	Text	No	No	My friend's house	Mambe texted and deleted his message	No	No	Mambe
07.05.2019	00:05	Whats App	2 hours	Text	No	No	My friend's house	Why he deleted his message, Mambe's childish behavior	No	No	Ana
	10:33	Whats App	40 minutes	Text	No	No	On my way to school	About him coming to Antalya and wanting to stay with his friends instead of me, arguing about this	No	No	Ana

Interviews

Example 1

Natalia: if you could tell me how your relationship started and how long have you been together?

A: In January 2017 I graduated from high school and I always wanted to travel and this was the first opportunity, so I went to South Africa. I stayed at this hostel in Cape Town and he was there visiting a friend and doing marketing for the hostel. We met on my second day and we stayed together for the whole time that I was there and then left and I didn't see him anymore I went back to Brazil. I stayed there for a year after I met him, but then I moved to Portugal where I was for another year and now I'm in Italy. After I left, it was kind of supposed to end there, it was like a vacation fling but we kept talking and in six months I had another vacation and I had the opportunity to travel again and I decided to go back so we could see each other and see where this was going. Then we've been together since that second trip. I've been to South Africa once more in total 3 times. We met two years and half ago, but we've been together for two years.

Natalia: So you see each other every half year?

A: Well, we went an entire year without seeing each other, after the second time I travelled there we went an entire year without seeing each other. But then I spent three months there before I started studying again. When I go on that side I always spend like two months on average and when he came here he spent one month, so it's quite a fair amount of time.

Natalia: And how often do you talk to each other?

A: Everyday. Everyday. We have what we call "off days" which are days when we don't talk. We got that agreement because in a long-distance relationship you become too attached to your phone, because it's the only way to connect to the other person. So you can disconnect from the place you are at. Especially for me, because I'm new to Italy, I just moved here so I really need to make friends and have a social life here. So we have off days. Sometimes we don't do them when it comes to the day we just keep texting each other, but we try to keep it serious. It's usually on Friday. Sometimes we change it. But apart from, we that talk everyday. It's always different: sometimes we FaceTime, sometimes only phone calls. So it depends on the mood.

Natalia: Do you also text?

A: Yes, a lot a lot throughout the day, I mean our calls are pretty long we should call for one hour , and hour and a half every day, so that's pretty long. But we do text throughout the day. We don't like texting a lot, but we still do it, but we prefer calling or video calling.

Natalia: Do you send pictures to each other?

A: Yes, yes of various things. If I cook something or if he wants to show me something he's working on. Or if I'm in the city, if I see something cool I can send him a picture. We do communicate through pictures a lot.

Natalia: Do you also send selfies?

A: Yes, yes, we can send selfies. We do it mainly as a joke. For example if he hasn't text there in a while I could send him a selfie like “you know I'm here and waiting for text”. I send more selfies than he does. Sometimes I tell him “I haven't seen your face in so long” and then he'll send me a selfie.

Natalia: you mentioned that use FaceTime mostly? What other platforms do you use?

A: we use WhatsApp quite a lot. He doesn't use Facebook a lot, so we use video call on WhatsApp mostly.

Natalia: Do you talk through Facebook messenger?

A: No, I would say 90% of the communication is through WhatsApp. We use Instagram quite a lot, because I tag him in things. And then we reply to each other. I would say we stay between WhatsApp and Instagram.

Natalia: Do you have a little rituals when you talk to each other? Maybe you have dinner together? Or you're watching a movie together?

A: We have never watched movies together, we have never done that. We have had dinner together, maybe on special occasions, like Valentine's Day. But no other rituals, I don't think so. It's usually just calls are and we're multitasking. That kind of thing.

Natalia: what is intimacy to you? Why do you understand when you hear the word intimacy?

A: I feel that I am someone who runs out of batteries in social interactions when I'm out in the large groups, so I feel that I'm intimate mainly because I never run out of battery when we're together. He is not someone that I have to recharge for. It's natural. It's very cliché to say but he is someone I can be myself with, so that's what I would call intimacy. I don't have to make an effort to be around him and I think it's the same for him.

Natalia: Do you think you can be intimate with someone even though you see him on a screen?

A: I think you can. Everytime I say I'm in a long distance relationship people want to know if we're the kind of couple who has never met or if we if we met over the Internet. I think that having been around him and having had the experience to know him, made a difference. In the first two times when we met after a long time apart it took a while to click off that screen mentality and realise that that person is real and he's in front of you. I think once you've established that and have built intimacy in that context then switching to two cell phones and screens I think it's fairly the same. I don't see much difference. I mean there are many many things that lack, that is why we travel to see each other and why we plan to be in the same city. But I definitely think you can be intimate even though you see the person on a screen. I don't think I could be with someone else for two hours every day on the phone, so I think that says something about how intimacy survives in long-distance relationships.

Natalia: When you see each other in person after you've been apart, is it awkward in the beginning or do you feel intimate straightaway?

A: The first time I went there after having met him after the first year we were apart, that was weird. But during those first six months we didn't have this intensity in communication. We didn't talk everyday and it was a bit of a summer romance, we didn't have this intimacy, that is why it was a bit awkward. But that doesn't happen any more.

Natalia: And do you think technology played a role with you not feeling awkward any more?

A: I think so. If it weren't for technology we worked we wouldn't have been able to develop and have what we have now. Without being able to call each other, without being able to check content online, because when you're in a long-distance relationship don't have mutual everyday experiences and you have to come up with things. Otherwise there's nothing to say. So a lot of things we discuss are things we find on the Internet, of course, also things that happen everyday in our lives, but in a

way, for example if I'm trying to make him relate to something from my culture, I can refer him to something from the Internet. So in that sense, technology plays a big role in the dynamic of the relationship.

Natalia: Do you think that online interactions have the same intensity do they replace the face-to-face interactions?

A: no, I think the intensity is definitely different when it is face-to-face. There's so much more and better... I don't think that it's the same. I think that a lot can happen online and if I would describe chapters of our relationship, there are definitely a few ones that happened solely online, like transitions and conversations we've had, moments when we decided where to go with the relationship. So I think there is a degree of intensity in online interactions, but I think that in person it's a whole different thing.

Natalia: One of the main components of intimacy is physicality: how do you replace that when long-distance?

A: It's very hard. We have a different set up, it is not a traditional set up. Throughout the years we've had moments when we talked about the need of being physical, especially when we were one year apart and we had moments when we were okay with opening the relationship, interview with other people in our lives and that is something that we're done in the past. we have done it less and less in the past months we grown out of this need to be with other people, but that is an energy that is there. It is nice to know that there is this space for us to relieve this kind of energy in a respectful way. Because we both know that it it can be really hard not seeing each other for an entire year and not have this type of contact. So I think it is a tricky question, because obviously if you're in a relationship you want to be with that person and you want to have that kind of intimacy with that person, specifically and you can't replace it with technology. I mean obviously there's stuff you can do online and try to maintain a sexual life online, but that is not the same thing at all, so it's just hard. I don't think you can replace it.

Natalia: do you send each other sexy pictures or sexy texts?

A: We tried to do that. We tried the sexting thing and it turned out to be not our thing. It wasn't appealing to us. We talk about it sometimes, we discuss sex live in terms of what we're going to do when we're together. It didn't work for us.

Natalia: Do you display your relationship on social media?

A: we do, we do display it. He writes so sometimes he'll post something he wrote for me. I post pictures, but we are not... we don't do that all the time, it's not an ostensible thing.

Natalia: Do you think that displaying it helps make it stronger while you're away from each other?

A: I think it does. I think in a sense, it doesn't make it stronger between us, but stronger in a weird way and it is a bit odd to recognise that, but sometimes it is a bit frustrating when people don't recognise your relationship as a real one. So in that sense, it gives a sense of external validation when you are posting pictures and showing people that you're together. In a weird way, social media exposure makes the relationship stronger in the eyes of others, but not between us. For us it's not important.

Natalia: What do you talk about? Daily stuff? More important subjects?

A: We talk about all sorts of stuff. I went to a difficult period when I moved to Italy, so we discussed that a lot. We discussed everything deep stuff, childhood drama and then coming to trivial stuff, things that happen everyday, day-to-day stress, anything...

Natalia: so the screen is not a barrier for you?

A: No, not really

Natalia: Do you think he's different on screen and in person?

A: I think it's definitely different. There's something about the energy of being in the presence of each other. If you look at the dialogues that we have in person and on the phone, they're the same. But there is something about the energy of the other person, having him around. There were also moments when, for example, I was sad because I was alone in Italy, and we both knew that there was nothing to me said. The other person wants to make you feel comfortable and if you were in person you would hug the person, you would offer physical attention in that changes the depth of conversation.

Natalia: advantages and disadvantages of technology and long-distance relationships?

A: An advantage of technology is that it makes this kind of relationship possible. It's the only way for us to communicate, there are letters but it's complicated. Day-to-day communication solely

relies on technology. I don't think it has any other advantages when we compare it to in person interactions.

Disadvantages, I think it changes the availability of the other person, because when we're in person, there's a rhythm to our interactions. For example, the times I've been to South Africa, we were both working, so we would wake up in the morning she would go to work out go to work. We our own schedules, we didn't speak for the time we were at work and we would come back at home and at night we would have our time together. With technology and also being away that means that I can text him whenever and then if he doesn't answer, I can get a bit paranoid. He also likes to keep his phone off for long periods of time, which drives me crazy. So technology gives that false idea that the other person is always available, when they're not really. So that would be a disadvantage for me. The sensation that the person is always there, you can always message them and there will always be able to pick up a call and as text. It can get a bit frustrating.

Natalia: Can you fall in love with the help of technology?

A: I don't know. I think it's an in-person experience, so I don't know. My experience of falling in love was in-person, Technology came after that and it helped us develop what we had in person, but the whole process it was in person. There are little things of how we fell in love that couldn't be replicated with technology, for example being flirtatious, I think those are exclusive to interpersonal interactions.

Example 2

Natalia: Hello. Hi. Sorry, I had a bit of an issue with my Wi-Fi. Can you hear me?

T: Hi! No problem.

Natalia: Okay. All right. First of all thank you for accepting to take part in my study. I hope it wasn't here.

T: It's great. It was very interesting.

Natalia: Shall we start? If you can tell me a bit about your relationship how long you've been together how it started and all those details.

T: So first we were just writing to each other online and then last year I travelled to Oslo city and we met there and ever since we've been together for about a year.

Natalia: But you met online.

T: Ah yes.

Natalia: OK. That's very interesting. Can I ask how online? Like through which platform?

T: Some chat platform and later we exchanged Skype IDs. We talked like that.

Natalia: OK. So you started talking on Skype before you met?

T: Yes.

Natalia: And how often do you see each other like physically?

T: A few times a month, I would say.

Natalia: Oh OK. So he lives in Oslo?

T: Yes. And I live in Tallinn.

Natalia: Yeah. OK. And how often do you communicate?

T: Every day. Every day on WhatsApp.

Natalia: Do you usually text or do you talk on the phone?

T: We mostly text, then if we're too lazy to type we just do some short recordings. and we call. We call maybe once a week.

Natalia: And do you use WhatsApp for that? Or do you use Skype?

T: WhatsApp. Yeah we moved to WhatsApp now.

Natalia: Can I ask why you moved to WhatsApp?

T: Don't really remember. I think, it seemed more convenient than Skype or more instant. And I remember my Skype kind of didn't show notifications and I use Skype for work. So I decided to move my private chat to WhatsApp.

Natalia: And do you use phones do you use computers when you text or talk?

T: The WhatsApp only on mobile.

Natalia: But do you use Facebook Messenger for example or...?

T: No, we don't. Cause he's not on Facebook and I know he has messenger still, but we don't use that.

Natalia: Mm hmm. But do you have social media platforms?

T: I do, but he doesn't. He doesn't have any.

Natalia: And when you say you call each other once a week, do you use the video function or is it just the audio?

T: Yes, we use the video function and when I'm like already off to bed sometimes he can keep talking, but we switch off the video and leave just the sound.

Natalia: Mm hmm. OK. And do you have like little routines? Maybe have dinner together or watch you movie while you have this talks?

T: No, we've never done that.

Natalia: Has your routine changed since you saw each other face to face or was it like that before?

T: Oh no. I haven't noticed any changes. It's been like this for a while.

Natalia: And what is intimacy to you?

T: Intimacy is like being open with another person and telling them your exact thoughts and feelings and sharing anything without the fear of being judged, for example or without just fear of getting some negative or abandoned feedback. And so I would say, openness.

Natalia: And do you feel that technology is a barrier for that. Or did you feel that you were as open as you wanted?

T: I think technology has made it easier because I can instantly share what I see or what I feel whenever I want to contact the person. And it's very instant. I do feel it also intensifies maybe the sexual experience when you have like a sexy or more intimate call it also gives more. I think it adds up. I don't think it limits. I think it adds up.

Natalia: You think it adds? But do you think he is different when you see him face to face and compared to when you see him on your screen? Is there any difference?

T: I definitely feel very happy to see him on screen. What's different about real life, meeting in real life is that he's genuine, he's not hiding anything. I can see him the way he is. Sometimes when communicating I felt that maybe I am adding too much thought about what is happening because I don't actually see it and the other activities that I can do while I'm texting are also kind of just in the background.

Natalia: And do you think you can create this intimacy with technology and through apps?

T: I think it can be. I definitely know because before that we have been talking for like maybe a year or more before meeting. And we've had very intense like sexual conversations. And so I think it like added up to it. I don't know if that was intimacy, but it's definitely really sexual tension.

Natalia: Yes, but intimacy is such a different thing to to everyone. There is no set definition for it. So that was also one of my questions, because when I was researching it, physicality is one of the main elements - very important. So I wanted to ask - when you're not physically together, how do you replace this part of the relationship? So well you answered it, but can I ask do you send each other pictures or do you use the video call or..?

T: We've used video call, but mostly, just texting like sexy talk. Very verbal. But we've also done like video and pictures. Yeah.

Natalia: But do you also send each other on a day to day basis pictures? Not necessarily sexy ones but I don't know other types.

T: Do we send just random pictures?

Natalia: Yeah. Like selfies or whatever?

Tatjana: Yeah, throughout the day we can send if there's like "Oh I am wearing this" or "oh I am here right now" or something just to get a picture about what we are doing or where we are.

Natalia: Yeah. OK. And do you think that these online interactions have the same intensity or do they replace the face to face?

T: That's a very good question. I don't know... Maybe it will sound like it's something I've experienced when we were together. Meeting and just getting to know each other. I kind of couldn't wait to get back online a few times, to go back to texting, because I was so used to it and I just so I'm still used to texting him that it would be it's just such a big part of our relationship right now.

Natalia: So you think it's the same intensity, sometimes even more online?

T: Yeah I think the deeper the real life communication gets the deeper and meaningful also the texts are, because we kind of know each other already. And so our texts are more meaningful. We don't have to be or pretend to be someone else or something.

Natalia: But do you think you can get to know a person and fall in love through technology?

T: Yes, you think it can. I think you can. Of course, it has a lot to do with fantasy and you know your current state if you are lonely I feel like when I was more lonely or more bored I was looking for online interactions, rather than going out and meeting people in real life. But as the relationship gets deeper, I think the texts are also more intense and genuine. I think yeah, it's possible.

Definitely.

Natalia: Mm hmm. And I think you also answered my next question. Do you talk about daily stuff or you go into deeper conversations? Or you wait until you see each other face to face to have those? I don't know how for example the future of your relationship. Do you talk about it through text or video?

T: I think we have discussed it through text and our topic, daily topics really vary a lot. From everyday things like food or something going on in our cities. Through more relationship stuff too. But I feel that in real life it's better to discuss because when I'm texting and my phone is somewhere with me in a work situation or wherever I cannot really talk about it I have to focus on other things, so I don't think it's the place to do it because I can't give it my full attention. But yeah I don't mind.

Natalia: You don't mind it. And how does it feel when you meet each other after a long time you've been apart? Do you need time to re-establish this intimacy? Or is it instantaneous?

T: I would say it's instantaneous and I always I'm very excited to meet him. And I always have trouble sleeping the night before and just feeling excited for the meeting. And yeah, I don't think it

needs to be replenished or something. I think it's on the same level or going deeper each time anyway.

Natalia: And do you think technology plays a role in that? In the fact that you can connect easily?

T: Yeah. I think so because of the constant connection, like you can write to him whenever and he'll reply whenever. It's not like, I don't know some centuries back where people had to wait for letters for many years. So I think that technology helps in that matter.

Natalia: You met online so I don't know if this question is valid, but do you think you'd be together if it weren't for technology?

T: I don't think so. Probably because we met online. So it's a little bit too much of a hypothesis. But I think he definitely inspired me to travel to another country and kind of discover what's going on and stuff. So yeah, without the internet I don't think so. Well I mean, if something happened to the Internet right now, I think we would still find away, but before that, yeah, no.

Natalia: And what would be some advantages and some disadvantages of technology in your day to day life and in your relationship?

T: Disadvantages can definitely be some misunderstandings and also people kind of maybe not being very genuine, like portraying themselves as someone else. It's a lot easier to do online. The advantages are the instant connection and maintaining of your relationship and just staying connected.

Natalia: And you said you have social media platforms. Do you do you post about your relationship on it?

T: No. No, I don't.

Natalia: You don't post anything. Why not?

T: I was never really public with other relationships as well on social media platforms. And also I don't think it's something that maybe he would be comfortable. So yeah, I just don't feel like posting it.

Natalia: OK, I understand. And do you have a schedule for communicating with each other or is it just... do you have this routine up saying good morning or good night?

T: Oh yeah, we say good morning upon waking up or whatever. I think more often than not, we're not saying good night because we just pass out before we get a chance to say it. Not routine, rather chaotic and random communication.

Natalia: OK. I think these were my questions. Thank you.

K: Hi. How are you?

Natalia: I'm good. How are you?

K: Good. I just finished with my class so I'm like...

Natalia: OK what class was it?

K: I teach English and it's a little difficult sometimes because it's an online class so they sometimes don't understand me. It is what it is.

Natalia: So you teach Spanish people?

K: Yes I teach Spanish people exactly.

Natalia: Cool. That's nice. So thank you for accepting to take part in this study. So if you could start by telling me a bit about your relationship, how you met and how long you've been together for so me?

K: I met him officially when we were still in middle school. We were kids.

Natalia: OK so how old are you?

K: Twenty six. So I moved to the town in sixth grade and we knew each other you know, on the playground and stuff like that. And then we went to different high schools, different colleges and even after college I was working a lot. But we reconnected last year and we started dating last summer. So we've been dating for only like eight-nine months now, so not too long. But the reason why we decided to date was because he was going away to the Middle East and I knew I was going to be in Spain. So we were going to just leave each other, but we couldn't, so we decided to date and so we've been mostly long distance since we started. But like I said I know him from school. We were friends before, so it wasn't so like strangers, it just was OK.

Natalia: So when you did you start being long distance after you decided to be together?

K: It's weird because I left for a month, then I came back and then I left again and then I came back. So it was like very on and off, but it's been official since January. Since January we've been apart.

Natalia: How often do you communicate?

K: Every day. All the time. It's very like... between my classes I would text him like a lot of it was between commuting and then basically at night we would face time for maybe 15 minutes to an hour depending on how much time we have. So not every night we face time but we try to, whenever possible.

Natalia: And how often do you see each other?

K: We haven't seen each other since February. I won't see him most likely until July. And if that doesn't happen then I won't see him until December, because he's in the Army, so he can't leave and

I can't visit until there is an actual approval. The only thing we can do is face time. It's the best I can do.

Natalia So do you only use face time or do you use like Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp?

K: We text through WhatsApp, but we use face time because the quality's better. So texting with WhatsApp calling with FaceTime. So we have a system. Yeah basically yeah. He doesn't have very good service there, so we have to play around with everything. Also he only has Facebook and he doesn't have Instagram or anything like that either, so we don't really do Facebook. We just stick with the messaging. We don't do anything on social media, basically.

Natalia:Do you ever post about you as a couple?

K: No. No, I'm not that kind of person, you know, like I don't need to tell everybody how much I love him. It's just not me. So I don't do that. I might do something like that maybe once it gets closer to him coming home. But even and I don't think I will.

Natalia OK so you said that you usually use WhatsApp for communicating face time and would you say that you text more or talk more?

K: We text more, I would say, But we do try to talk on the phone. I call him whenever I can, but if I'm on the bus like yesterday, and I've tried to call him on the bus and he's like "I can't hear anything" so then we just go back to texting.

Natalia Yeah. And you said you use the video function every night, if possible?

K: Yeah. We try to. Last night we didn't get a chance to face time, the night before we did it. But I would say, at least four nights a week, we Facetime.

Natalia OK you said you use it at least four nights a week.

K: Exactly.

Natalia: And when you use it you do other things, like do you have dinner together or watch movies or... ?

K: No, we don't we share any specific moments, because we just never are on the same schedule. We usually just catch up and maybe talk about something like Game of Thrones. He has dinner in the army base, so he can't make a video chat while doing that. He doesn't cook his own meals so it's a different situation. I'm usually in bed or I'm cooking and he's watching me cook or he's watching me do something. But it's always me doing something on my own because he's more restricted.

Natalia OK. What is intimacy to you?

K: Intimacy is literally physically being together and that's like exactly what's missing right now, that physical touch. I mean obviously, we can share our affection and with words but it's never

gonna be the same as holding hands or just hugging each other, because that's obviously a big part I think intimacy is just physically having someone standing next to you.

Natalia: That is actually one important component of intimacy. At least, that's what researchers say. How do you replace it? If you're a long distance, do you send out do you send each other pictures?

K: Oh yeah, we send pictures to each other. My roommate has a dog, so I hug the dog... I'm always sending him like random photos throughout the day and just kind of like keep him involved with what I'm doing, like I went for a hike yesterday, so I kept sending him pictures from everything that I was doing. But I think to be physically intimate - yeah, we have our sexting or whatever you want to call it, like you know it happens. But it's just not the same as actually being with somebody. So yeah, we do that, I'm not going to lie.

Natalia I'm very happy that people talk about it. Because it's such an important part of a relationship and then when you're apart you need to replace it. So do you send pictures or do you also use the video function? Or both?

K: Both. So we do that every so often, it's not like every week or anything like that, but kind of like if we're in the mood for it, it happens. But, he technically has a roommate, so we can't do regularly, it's just so it just happens when it does. I don't know if he'll want to talk about it, but I don't mind talking about that.

Natalia Every single girl has said about their partner.

K: So like I said, we've done both. We will continue doing that, because it's the only part like that's physical that's left here. Only thing that we can do.

Natalia Yeah, but do you think that this online interactions have the same intensity?

K: No. I mean, I still crave that like, intimacy and stuff like that it's still not the same but, it's the only thing that you can do and keep things exciting and fresh without getting bored of each other or turning into just friends or because at some point it's going to be just like a friendship because there's nothing going on. You know?

Natalia And how does it feel when you meet each other after being apart for a longer time?

K: Oh God It's like a nauseating feeling, because you're so excited. And for me being in Europe, and he was in the United States. You know, it's always like a pretty long journey for me and so it'll be like 10 hours of travel and it's like anxiety and it's like I just can't wait to be there. So he actually makes fun of me because I love to sleep, but every time I go back home to see him, I would not sleep. And he just doesn't understand that that's not me normally, it's just more of that excitement. This is our time - let's spend it together. So I don't want to sleep.

Natalia: But do you feel intimate straight away?

K: I think the relationship is still pretty new. I don't see having an awkward stage even if I see him after a few months, I don't see it being awkward. But I don't know... The longest we went without seeing each other was like a month, month and a half. So this is really a long period of time that we're gonna be apart.

Natalia Do you think technology plays a role in that you can feel intimate straight away?

K: Yeah, definitely. I mean if we weren't talking every day I mean it just wouldn't... Not that you would forget but you become a stranger. I mean if you're not talking to that person. No matter how much you love them, it's kind of hard to keep those feelings flowing. I don't know, it's weird. I definitely think technology helps. Definitely.

Natalia: Yeah. Do you think you'd still be together if it weren't for technology?

K: I'm kind of a psychopath when it comes to relationships. So I probably would drive myself crazy and I don't know if I would be able to. Only because... not that I don't trust him, because there's nothing that he's doing in there. It's not that I don't trust him but it just would be so difficult to keep things going. How do you have a relationship with someone you don't talk to? But I feel like I would try I would at least definitely give it a shot. But like I said, technology is make it so much easier. He's constantly in my life, knows what's happening, is up to date. And I think he would be more worried because I'm the one living my regular life and technically not regular. I'm living a new life in Barcelona. New people he doesn't know, he doesn't know my life. So I think he'd go crazy not knowing what's happening, especially because I'm not surrounded by my friends or family I'm with strangers, basically. So he would go off the deep end with craziness.

Natalia So technology is kind of a gateway.

K: Yeah, for sure.

Natalia What do you talk about? You talk about everything, do you talk about more difficult subjects? Or do you wait until you're face to face?

K: We don't have the opportunity to wait with difficult subjects, so if something happens. We have to talk like last night actually we had a tough conversation with him, because of something that happened to me yesterday at a restaurant and then I ended up yelling at him, even though I wasn't angry at him. But I was frustrated and trying to get my emotions out and I just destroyed him yesterday by screaming at him. So I take the blame for that and I apologize. Then we're OK. I do feel terrible that he was the one who received it and if we were in person it wouldn't have happened. If we were in person, he would've hugged me and I would have been fine, but because it's just words it doesn't help me calm down. It makes me more angry. So yeah, we talk about everything you basically. Like day to day stuff. I ask him everyday what he ate for lunch, what he had for

dinner because his life is so routine, not much that he has to share, so I try to ask him about things like that. So I tell him about my day to day stuff, plans. You know, we talk about our future when he comes home. It's not just like surface stuff. We do talk about more feelings and whatnot. Every so often as well.

Natalia Do you have like a schedule or little routines of your own, like saying Good morning?

K: Oh yeah, so basically he works 4:00 a.m. to noon. That's why we're also on weird schedules, because he has to go to sleep earlier than I do. But if he's working in the morning I always tell him to text me in the morning or he's sleeping in the night, I text him. So we try to keep the face time routine going. Mm hmm. I don't know, I feel like it's all a routine at this point, because it's all we have.

Natalia Do you think there are any advantages of long distance relationships?

K: I decided to move to Spain or decided this transition before we really started dating. Like I knew I was going to do it whether or not we were gonna be doing this long distance. I was like. I'm moving. This is what I want. So this has given me the opportunity to live my life without feeling guilty that he's home. You know he's doing his thing and I'm doing my thing. So I guess that is an advantage in a sense where I got to pursue what I wanted to do. The only difference is that now if we work out and he comes home in December, I'm expected to go home in December. I've been here for a year and that's more than enough time for me, I believe.

Natalia So you think an advantage would be that you can pursue your dreams?

K: Yeah exactly, that I was able to do what I wanted to do without feeling like I had the expectation of staying home or something. I decided that this is what I'm going to do and no one's going to stop. And you know, him being away it just was the perfect opportunity. That's what I decided to stay together.

Natalia Do you think you can fall in love with the help of technology?

K: Oh love... Well I guess... Like little things like he surprised me with a gift. So with technology he was able to order it online and ship it to me. Only problem is I still haven't received it because of the shipping company and customs. That's a different story. But just the fact that he was able to still be thoughtful while apart and know that I needed something and send me that, you know even if it was a stupid printer it's not even like anything romantic, but the fact that he heard me and my complaints and did that for me.

Natalia Is there a difference between him when you face time or when you text him in real life?

K: Oh for sure! It's like, I don't know... those little things, like the little things that you do like the small touches, you know that kind of affection is not there. But also I think face timing brings him

back to almost reality for me. Sometimes with texting we kind of get into that habit of texting texting and so I just want to sit down and look at the face and you're like Wow. I missed this! So it's like the texting and the face time brings the reality to it. And obviously, being in person's the best.

Natalia All right. I think these are my questions.

Example 4

Natalia: Thank you so much for accepting to take part in my study. So I have a few questions for you. If you could tell me a bit about your relationship? How long you've been together?

T: We have to say about 2 years ago, early 2017, through a dating website. Started the relationship officially first of July 2017.

Natalia: What do mean you started the relationship officially?

T: We talked about it and then realized that we want to do this.

Natalia: For some people dating websites, it seems like you know, it can be an option that it's quite difficult to go, they'd still prefer to meet someone in real life. And how did you decide to do it?

T: For me it was a hard choice because I've been single from early 2013, having various relations, but nothing serious. Then I thought why not? Other people seem to make it work? Why shouldn't I do it myself?

Natalia: Because now it is we have this choice of Tinder and Bumble and then because I think from what your partner told me you met on OkCupid. So did you try Tinder before or Bumble or did you go straight for the...?

T: No, I tried most Swedish dating website - Happy Pancake. OkCupid was recommended by a friend.

Natalia: That's probably the difference between Tinder and OkCupid. I guess they tend to look for something serious. Okay. How often do you communicate when you're apart?

T: We try to do it everyday, but it can be difficult.

Natalia: I understand that your job is a bit more... it's a bit more difficult to communicate sometimes.

T: Yes, absolutely, I work at a Swedish minesweeper vessel. According to emission plans made for various operations we undertake. In most cases, we are not allowed to use cell phones at all when we're at sea.

Natalia: And how long do these type of operations take or is it different?

T: Usually about 11 days or two weeks.

Natalia: Wow, that must be difficult. How often do you see each other if you could tell me a bit about your schedule and how does it work? Because from what I understood it's a few months that you're away and then you come back.

T: This year, first two months I had just normal office hours. A few days I was on watch duty, 2 or 3 days in a month. And I've been away, first for a period of 5 days Monday through Friday in March and then in April, I was away for two weeks in a row. So that would be the schedule for the year.

Natalia: Do you find that your relationship, the dynamics of it and the way you feel about the relationship is different when you're away and when you use this digital media and to communicate compared to when you're together?

T: When I'm away we almost don't use any kind of things to communicate. Maybe a phone call on Satellite.

Natalia: And you don't use Skype, right?

T: It depends on which kind of operation I'm undertaking. In most cases we're not allowed to use the Internet or cell phones. That's not for me to decide.

Natalia: I understand. Do you usually text or talk?

T: When we get an opportunity, I prefer to call.

Natalia: Okay, and you have a schedule and I guess it's a bit difficult to come up with a schedule when you're you don't really know if you're going to have this window of opportunity so you don't really have a schedule to communicate with each other.

T: She knows I will call whenever possible. And that's about it.

Natalia: So then from what from what I understand you don't really use the video function.

T: It depends. When I'm on guard duties, if the ship is harbored, we can use Skype and video. That happens when I'm doing duty officer work.

Natalia: Do you find that it's different from a phone call?

T: Yes, it's always better to see the each other and the full face reactions. I like video calls.

Natalia: What is intimacy to you?

T: Everything more than just regular phone call. Everything in an increasing order from kissing each other on apps, through Skype, doing fun things that grown-ups do.

Natalia: I see. And then how do you create it through this technology when you're away? how do you maintain it? What do you do?

T: You rely on the closest best thing that you have in this case, apps.

Natalia: What are you talk about when you when you talk? I saw that you put in some things in your diary about what you talked about. But what I'm curious to know is do you talk about the trivial stuff that happened to you every day? Or do you go into deep deeper subjects or you keep those for when you're face-to-face?

T: More like every conversation with can be very specific planning or everyday talk or ideas for the future. It can be anything, just like in real life. I speak my mind.

Natalia: What would be some advantages and disadvantages of this long-distance relationships and using technology with them?

T: There are advantages to long-distance relationships, that you get to long for each other, that's more important than you think. Many people underestimate this feeling of actually longing for each other and not taking each other for granted.

Natalia: You think that helps you appreciate the relationship more the time that you were apart. Do you think your relationship would be different if you would be there and have the routine with living it with each other every day?

T: Yes.

Natalia: Okay, and some disadvantages?

T: Of course. You are away from each other, you spend less time together. It's possible to miss birthdays or graduations or events like that. That is kind of a downer.

Natalia: Is this your first long-distance relationship?

T: No, it's not.

Natalia: Do you do find some similar patterns between the relationships?

T: No, this time it's much better, because of our way of communicating. It's much easier to keep each other together.

Natalia: But do you think that these online interactions have the same intensity or do they make up for the lack of face-to-face interaction?

T: Of course, they can't replace, but this is the best thing that's available.

Natalia: When speaking about intimacy, one of the main components is physicality like researchers that study intimacy, they think some of them they think that being close physically to one another is what builds it. So what do you do when you're away? How do you replace that?

T: It's more like kind of a steady buildup for when I'm coming home. You can talk to each all you want, but it doesn't replace physical intimacy.

Natalia: But do you share fantasies or pictures with each other?

T: Yes. We don't have actual phone sex. We talk about things that we would like to do to each other.

Natalia: And do you also send pictures, sexy ones and regular ones, or is it just her who sends them?

T: Both of us. I send selfies when I'm allowed.

Natalia: Do you use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat?

T: I don't actually have a smartphone, so I like only use Facebook or send short text messages from the cell phone.

Natalia: What do you use more: regular texting or the messenger Facebook function?

T: Messenger

Natalia: Do you also use it for phone calls?

T: No, regular mobile phone calls or Skype in some cases.

Natalia: Do you display your relationship on social media, like Facebook or... ?

T: Not much. That's more like when we're actually physically together at home.

Natalia: what do you share?

T: Maybe some picture update, something from our home, like "Look we made these Easter decorations with skulls and bunny ears and octopus and stuff". But she shares more than me.

Natalia: But do you think that displaying is on social media helps make the relationship stronger?

T: No, it doesn't matter. No, it doesn't matter.

Natalia: But then why do you share those things?

T: Because it's fun

Natalia: Do you think you can fall in love and maintain this love with the help of technology?

T: Yeah, it helps. If I didn't have any opportunity of contacting her in any way, it would have been a lot harder.

Natalia: I think these are my questions so far. Thank you!

Example 5

RJ: Hello.

Natalia: Hi. Morning.

RJ: Good morning.

Natalia: Thank you for accepting to take part in this study, first of all.

RJ: It sounds interesting.

Natalia: I hope it is. I hope the results will be. So shall we start?

RJ: Yeah.

Natalia: Could you tell me how I met? And how long you've been together. A bit about your relationship?

RJ: Oh well, we went to school in grammar school together. So we've known each other for a big part of our life. But we started actually dating probably around October of last year. That's just about it. That's how we met and started dating. And my best friend dates her best friend and that's how we ended up being together.

Natalia: So you have the same circle of friends group of friends kind of?

RJ: Yeah.

Natalia: And how long after you started dating did you start being long distance?

RJ: I would say pretty quickly. By the time we started like going out on dates and stuff that was around August. So I started going off to Poland and she started going off to Barcelona and all these other places and I was doing a lot of the army thing so I would say most of our actual actual relationship has been long-distance mostly.

Natalia: Ok. And how often do you communicate?

RJ: We could be communicating just about all day. Pretty much right. Mostly WhatsApp, like texting all day, but usually at night we FaceTime.

Natalia: And you only use FaceTime and WhatsApp? You don't use Facebook Messenger or... ?

RJ: No, this is actually the first time I use Facebook Messenger as like, you know, face to face thing.

Natalia: Uh huh OK. And do you have any social media platform profile? I mean, you have Facebook. Do you have any other?

RJ: Just Snapchat. And sometimes Karolina and I use it, but I'm not very like into using it at all. Sometimes she could send me a random picture. So in that sense, I don't even really use it that much.

Natalia: But do you also send her pictures?

RJ: I usually send their pictures through WhatsApp. Not on Snapchat.

Natalia: Mm hmm. Like pictures of your surroundings or selfies?

RJ: So yeah, yeah I'll do selfies. Sometimes I'll take pictures of where I'm at and what I'm doing. But those pictures have to be a little I don't know how you say censored as far as where I'm at.

Natalia: Would you say that usually you text or talk more on the phone?

RJ: Oh we definitely, we definitely text more. Because I do stuff throughout the day as far as work and actually sometimes at work she'll call me so we'll talk for a little bit depending on where I'm at.

Natalia: Yeah. But if you talk to then do you try to use the video function every time? Or it depends?

RJ: Definitely not at work because I don't have service there, like enough service. So I come back in my room and I have to pay for Wi-Fi. So it's definitely easier here to talk like that. I'm not having FaceTime anywhere else, besides my room.

Natalia: But do you do anything else while you FaceTime because she mentioned that sometimes she can cook or do you have dinners together or do you watch movies?

RJ: She would sometimes put up the iPad that she uses while in the kitchen. But for the most part we don't eat together. I'm on like a scheduled eating diet. We really don't have the time to eat together. As far as watching shows - we kind of watch them separately and talk about or discuss about them.

Natalia: Do you like what each other for fall asleep?

RJ: No, we don't do that.

Natalia: What is intimacy to you?

RJ: I would say it's just hard to be very intimate when we're so far apart. But I would just say it's about having conversations about how you feel and getting the same reply back or just the same amount of reply back now. For now, I guess that's intimacy for me.

Natalia: What do you think is the main component of it? The most important thing that creates this feeling of intimacy?

RJ: Just being able to kiss and grab hands and walk around and be able to really show each other that we love each other. I would say that would be good intimacy.

Natalia: How do you replace that with the help of technology?

RJ: It's given us the capability to kind of to have each other, as close as possible. You know, she's laying down in bed and I'm like in bed, it kind of gives the same... not the same, but a little bit of the effect that that we're together, laying down together. But other than that... It's still a big break. And you know touch and feel...

Natalia: So for you intimacy is being physical?

RJ: Yes, I mean I like to be physically... you know to be able to touch her. It is easier for me to kiss her and show her exactly how I feel.

Natalia: Mm hmm. Do you send sexy texts or sexy pictures?

RJ: I would say we do sometimes.

Natalia: Sometimes. Do you also use the video function for it?

RJ: Yeah, sometimes. Definitely. But not like, it's not all the time. Maybe like once every week or two.

Natalia: And the sexy pictures is it only her? Or is it also you who sends them?

RJ: It's both.

Natalia: And do you ever use several apps simultaneously? But I guess you don't because you said you only use WhatsApp for texting and you don't have Instagram, right?

RJ: No, we don't

Natalia: Do you post about your relationship on Facebook?

RJ: I never have. No, I don't think she ever has either. Maybe once. She'll post pictures of us like the events that we went to like the weddings that we've been to and like when we went to Italy and Germany and Denmark and all that stuff. She'll post about that, but I personally keep off my social media.

Natalia: Why?

RJ: Just because. I mean I'm going into the field of law enforcement in New Jersey. So I try and keep off of it because they make you like log on to it and look through all your social media. So that's a big reason why I don't do a lot of social media. Because it's just easier not to have them and also if I'm not very active on it, they can't really say anything about it.

Natalia: Yeah. Better be safe than sorry I guess. And what do you talk about when you talk on the phone? Do you do you talk about your daily life or do you hold off on more difficult subjects like your future? Or do you prefer to talk about them when you're face to face?

RJ: I would say some of it is general "how was your day", "What you did". We'll talk about that and then other portions, we'll talk about stuff that we've watched, you know Like I said we watch stuff separately and then have conversations about it. Like there's been a lot of stuff happening as far as my brother got engaged. My best friend... Some stuff has been going on here that we were able to talk about. It's not like just the every day to day basis, but there's a lot of stuff to talk about. But it's hard to think about it when you're not talking.

Natalia: But you don't have this idea that "oh, I should wait until we're face to face to talk about this subject"?

RJ: I would say since I'm since I'm deployed it's better off to say exactly what you feel and exactly what's on your mind, because if you wait all that time it becomes, you know, harder to talk about.

Natalia: Do you think you can express your feelings in the way you want them to be expressed, through technology?

RJ: No, definitely not. You definitely can't show certain emotions. You can't see emotions in text. That's why texts are taken so differently sometimes from the meaning and you're like "wait, I didn't even mean that". FaceTime's a little bit different because I can see, I can use hand gestures or you can see my facial expressions.

Natalia: Do you think that these online interactions can do they replace or have the same intensity as face to face?

RJ: No. No. And I would much rather like to be face to face.

Natalia: And how does it feel when you meet after a separation? Does it take a bit of time to reestablish the intimacy? Or is there this awkward phase a bit in the beginning? Or do you think you're connected straight away?

RJ: I would say connected straight away. The only times it was very awkward is when we first started dating, just because were, you know, awkward. We were, like I said, we were apart most of the relationship and she would come back or I would go meet her. It's just to me, I never felt awkward.

Natalia: Do you think technology plays a role in that?

RJ: Yes, I mean because we're like we're constantly constantly talking. We know each other's steps. So it really helps I guess in that matter.

Natalia: Do you think she's different when she's face to face and when you FaceTime? do you think there's something different about her?

RJ: No, I don't think there's anything different.

Natalia: Do you think you'd still be together if it weren't for technology and this digital media?

RJ: No, I don't think so. I don't think it would work.

Natalia: And do you think you can fall in love with the help of technology?

RJ: I would say yes. I mean when you're face to face with somebody... maybe you're not gonna be able to touch her every day but you FaceTime. You would get the same emotions. So I think yes.

Natalia: Do you think there's any advantages to long distance relationships?

RJ: I would say the only thing is that this made the relationship stronger. You know that you're gonna have to deal with everybody, like each other's problems through a phone and wouldn't be face to face - that's really tough to let the person understand that everything is all right.

Natalia: So you think that helps make their relationship stronger?

RJ: Yes.

Natalia: And what are some advantages of technology?

RJ: I think it's crazy that they have all this awesome media out there. Being able to have Facebook and WhatsApp and face time has allowed me to talk to a lot of people, a lot of people back home. Especially WhatsApp was very easy to teach to my grandmother.

Natalia: Do you mostly use your laptop or your phone?

RJ: I'm using my phone.

Natalia: And what would be some advantages of technology for maintaining this feeling of intimacy in your relationship?

RJ: Oh just because I could see her face. If I would if I weren't able to see her, intimacy would be very tough, as far as trying to get it through social media.

Natalia: Ok. I think these were most of my questions I hope it wasn't too difficult.