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Literature Review

The effect of social network sites (social media) on romantic relationships has become an interesting topic of study, especially in the last decade. The question is fairly simple, how does the ability to constantly interact and watch your significant others actions in an on-line group environment have an effect on your relationship? It is a fairly new conversation; as social media has only become incredibly popular in recent years. Professors of communication, psychology, and a plethora of other scholars are interested in the topic, resulting in multiple studies being completed in the last decade or so. After reviewing a plethora of scholarly articles and books, a couple of common conclusions and theories began to appear, along with multiple discrepancies.

Each research study that I analyzed completed their studies in different ways, whether it be surveys, interviews, or experiments. There were multiple common theories by each researcher, however I would like to focus primarily on three major conclusions. These three relate to my question of study the best, and were an overlying component in most of the studies. Firstly, social network sites, overall, seem to have a positive impact on relationships as a whole and especially the maintenance of those romantic relationships. Second, social media removes limits that are prevalent in real life situations creating an environment that allows for relationships to be formed easier, and outlets that make maintaining a relationship less difficult. Lastly, social media

enables more family interaction in romantic relationships and therefore helps to increase support from family members.

Positive Impacts and Relationship Maintenance

Researchers from the University of Amsterdam and the University of Philippines conducted a research study regarding the use of social networking and its impact in relationship maintenance, focusing not only on short distance but long distance relationships (Billedo Cherrie Joy, Kerkhof Peter, and Finkenauer Catrin). In their study they conducted a survey over 272 young adults who were in a relationship on Facebook, what they found were individuals are more likely to express their involvement and to gauge their partner's involvement in the relationship over social media. "The results of this study suggest that SNS (Social Network Sites) is a viable medium for relationship maintenance processes... Aside from regular interpersonal communications between couples, it provides social and public contexts for relationship processes that are typically limited..." Along with this study, another similar survey outlined the positive impact social networking can have on a relationship. The researchers derived several hypotheses from the self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986), they then surveyed people with questions regarding their relationship history and social media usage. They found that relationships in an online environment still allow for self-expansion, in the same way that relationships in real life do. In their conclusion they stated, "...behaviors such as tagging one's partner in status updates, appearing together in photographs, and listing similar interests on profiles are indicative of self-expansion processes typically found in romantic relationships... Facebook is not just a

medium for communication but also an electronic record of how ourselves and relationships evolve.” (Christopher J. Carpenter, Erin L. Spottswood)

Removing Limits and Allowing Relationships to Form

It is important not to judge social media communication as inherently bad for relationships. Student’s capacity to be alone, regulate anxiety, and delay gratification is significantly impacted by the user of social media, and these are all important factors in forming a relationship. “Many young people have formed relationships more easily thanks to social media sites, just as others have had problematic consequences. Shy people in particular, for example, now have bridges to others that may help overcome social anxiety via Facebook groups that can lead to more and improved face-to-face relationships.” (Michael C. Klein). Not only does social media help form relationships, but it helps to motivate individuals to act in a manner that affirms love for the other. Social media related jealousy may arouse a sense of protectiveness over the relationship, motivating one to act in a more loving matter. “Social network sites provide couples with public relational experiences and processes that otherwise would be very limited.” (Billeto Cherrie Joy, Kerkhof Peter, and Finkenauer Catrin).

Increased Support from Family

Multiple studies have found that family support is noticeably more impressive when a relationship is involved with social media. “We found extensive support for the social network effect, whereby relationship approval from family and friends leads individuals to feel more love, more committed, and more positive about a partner.” “We found extensive support for the social network effect, whereby relationship approval from family and friends leads individuals to feel

more love, more committed, and more positive about a partner.” (H. Colleen Sinclair, Diane Felmlee, Susan Sprecher, and Brittany L. Wright) Also, most participants perceive network support as an important factor of a relationships health and family connectivity. Borae Jin and Sohyun Oh, both authors and professors of communication conducted a study analyzing cultural differences of social network influences, in particular the differences between the US and South Korea. Although the main focus of their study was not family support, large portions of their study supplied valuable information regarding how family support can change in an online environment. The survey found that participants receive support for their romantic relationships from their friends and family more when they are involved with social media. Social networks allow for extended family to become more familiar with a specific family members romantic partner, forming a more positive bond between the individuals.

What's Missing?

Despite most evidence pointing towards social media being a positive influence on romantic relationships, not enough information is available to decide for sure whether it is beneficial or detrimental to a relationship. This controversy may be due to the fact that different researchers themselves different views of social media effects, allowing for a constant bias. For example, an older person who formed a relationship without social networks may have a more pessimistic view on social media, in comparison to a young college student who uses social media on the daily and has formed a relationship through doing so. Most studies confirming the positive effects of social media can be squandered by other research studies confirming the negative effects, with sufficient data to back it up. In my study, I want to establish with certainty whether or not the effects of social networks are mainly positive, or mainly negative. It is not plausible

for the effects to be completely one sided, however I believe as a whole it may be considered a positive or negative impact.