

Understanding The Communication Experiences of Indonesian Female Exchange Students in The Romantic Development Process That is Formed by Tinder Abroad

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the experiences of Indonesian female exchange students navigating the world of romantic relationships via Tinder. The study investigates how these women develop and attribute meaning to their relationships at various stages, focusing on the interplay of intercultural exchanges. The study intends to capture the richness and uniqueness of each individual's journey by employing a narrative analysis method. With matches coming from all over the world, the intercultural context shapes the trajectory of these relationships significantly. The findings of the study shed light on the many facets of these relationships, revealing the challenges, joys, and transformative moments encountered along the way. Additionally, this thesis has discovered that building relationships using online media as the primary means of getting to know one another is in fact trickier than starting with an in-person meeting. This thesis contributes to a broader understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals construct and navigate intimate relationships in a globalized and technologically driven within the context of romantic connections.

Keywords

intercultural romantic relationships, Tinder, narrative analysis, meaning-making

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menggali pengalaman para mahasiswi pertukaran pelajar Indonesia yang mengarungi dunia hubungan romantis melalui Tinder. Studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana para wanita ini mengembangkan dan mengaitkan makna dengan hubungan mereka pada berbagai tahap, dengan fokus pada interaksi pertukaran antar budaya. Studi ini bermaksud untuk menangkap kekayaan dan keunikan perjalanan setiap individu dengan menggunakan metode analisis naratif. Dengan kecocokan yang datang dari seluruh dunia, konteks antarbudaya membentuk lintasan hubungan ini secara signifikan. Temuan penelitian menjelaskan banyak aspek dari hubungan ini, mengungkapkan tantangan, kegembiraan, dan momen transformatif yang dihadapi di sepanjang jalan. Selain itu, tesis ini menemukan bahwa membangun hubungan menggunakan media online sebagai sarana utama untuk mengenal satu sama lain ternyata lebih sulit daripada memulai dengan pertemuan langsung. Tesis ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang beragam cara di mana individu membangun dan menavigasi hubungan intim secara global dan didorong oleh teknologi dalam konteks hubungan romantis.

Kata Kunci

Hubungan romantis interkultural, Tinder, analisis naratif, pembuatan makna

INTRODUCTION

Background

The ways of building relationships have changed drastically over time with the emergence of the Internet and smartphones. People could encounter strangers online, even form a romantic relationship. Tinder is one of the applications that participated in changing how people build relationships. Tinder is available both in Play Store and AppStore; it lets their users interact with new people from their nearby location and even worldwide just through their fingertips.

When it first launched in 2012, Tinder targeted university students as their users. Ever since the appearance of online dating sites or apps, the way students interact and connect with each other has transformed. Now, most university students see the formation of relationships as a lot less serious than it was deemed to be in the past. Everyone wants to have fun and enjoy the university experience, and dating apps such as Tinder, which is often seen as a quick and convenient way to find new people near you, truly helps university students to enjoy oneself and meet new people amidst their busy schedule.

Tinder truly changes the way how interpersonal communication takes place in romance. Interpersonal relationships play an important role in shaping human life. As social beings, humans have the tendency to depend on each other. Interpersonal communication can be defined simply as a direct communication between

two or more people, which allows them to capture people's emotions and reactions directly both verbal and non-verbal.

Interpersonal relationships are needed mainly for two things: feeling and dependence. The first one refers to emotionally intense relationships, while the latter refers to the instruments of interpersonal behaviours such as needing help, seeking the feeling of being approved by others, and proximity.

Surprisingly, years later, university students are still actively using Tinder as a tool to help them mingle with other students from the same school. Based on research conducted by Tinder, it finds that 62% of graduates who met their present or prior partners at university are still together. In the UK, 53% of graduates met their partners during their studies and the dating app seems to be a popular option to find new connections; especially for exchange students who are newly exposed to a whole other surrounding. Exchange students are students who are enrolled in a program which gives them the opportunity to study at another university for some amount of time. Sometimes, student exchange programs also offer opportunities for students to study abroad. This is why exchange programs are popular among students, because they will have the chance to experience and participate in many new things.

Before the internet existed, people would meet their potential partner face-to-face in cafes, dinner at the restaurants or bars. With the internet

and Tinder, the style of romance has shifted from coincidental meetings that seem 'destined' into initially searching. It feels that this generation is more 'impatient' in terms of romance. Tinder has also changed the ways interpersonal relationships are developed and maintained, and altered people's decision in choosing their partner. The options were kind of limited back then; phone calls, emails, or face-to-face meetings. Now, the options are pretty limitless, starting from chat messages until video calls could help in developing relationships with someone. These forms of communication are known as CMC, or computer mediated communication.

CMC is communication or human interactions between two people or more with the help of computer networks. It may be text, audio, graphics or video based and could occur directly (real-time) or indirectly. Most people might think that relationships that are formed through dating apps might have smaller chances to work as a consequence of the absence of non-verbal cues, which totally help to show closeness or proximity towards one another. With the help of CMC, communication can be done anywhere at any time which surely helps in building closeness and trust between individuals, and thus becomes one of the strengths of building relationships through Tinder.

Due to its popularity, many Indonesian students also use Tinder as a way of socializing with other students. Many Indonesian students who went through exchange programs tried out Tinder for various

reasons. The most common one is to get to know the city better while making friends. But the thing with Tinder is, people do not use this app solely for looking for friends. As time goes by, Tinder is often used to look for one-night stands or sexual relationships only, such as friends with benefits. This might come as a surprising experience or culture shock for some Indonesian students who are not used to this kind of nature back home.

The differences made by the culture that one is from may cause struggles or limitations when communicating, especially while trying to build a relationship. Intercultural partners are usually socialized in two different macro environments, and having similar or complementary orientations facilitates relationship development (McGoldrick and Preto, 2005:27). Usually, problems arise because two individuals have to navigate differences in communication patterns, family-of-origin dynamics, and gender roles. They might also come from different socioeconomic backgrounds or religions (Leslie & Young, 2015:789).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory

Kimberly Pearce, the president of CMM Institute for Personal and Social Environment, breaks down CMM into four claims about communication. The first claim is that our communication creates our social

world. This claim talks about how communication ‘makes’ selves, relationships, organizations, cultures, etc. our social world. According to Barnett Pearce, who summed up this fundamental idea of the theory, persons-in-conversation simultaneously form the worlds they create while also co-constructing their own social realities.

The second CMM claim states that there are significant differences between the stories we tell and the ones we live. When we converse with people about our social worlds—ourselves, others, relationships, groups, or the general public—a major portion of what we say is referred to by CMM as a story. The third claim on CMM, talks about how we get what we make. CMM declares that we create our social world through our patterns of communication. The last one claims that if we get the pattern right, we could create a better social world. A better social world, according to Barnett and Kim Pearce, would be filled with people who care, love, are compassionate, and have grace (Em Griffin, 2019:65-76).

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Early social constructionist George Herbert Mead (Em Griffin, 2019:53-63), stated that communication and symbolic interaction shape our thinking, sense of who we are, and the larger society in which we inhabit. In simplest terms, communication is the exchange of meaning through language and symbols that allows members of society to comprehend their social environments. Individuals, as actors in connection to

social groups, create symbolic and shared meanings via repeated acts of contact. Talking to each other, according to Mead, is the most human and humanizing action that anyone can partake in. He outlined the three fundamental ideas of symbolic interactionism—meaning, language, and thought.

Meaning here refers to how Individuals act in reference to the subjective meaning objects have for them. For Mead, meaning-making isn't an individual undertaking; rather it's a joint venture. Language, on the other hand, relates to the origin of meaning. The second tenet of Blumer's argument is that social contact between individuals produces meaning. In other words, language is used to negotiate meaning. But symbolic communication is more than just a way of expressing intelligence—also it's how we make sense of the world. A symbol conveys messages on how we are to feel about and respond to the object, event, or person to which it refers. The act of assuming an additional role is referred to as thinking. The final claim made by Blumer is that a person's understanding of symbols is influenced by their own mental processes.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Uncertainty Reduction Theory was first introduced by Chuck Gerber (Em Griffin, 2019:105-115), the theory basically explains the idea of reducing uncertainty about someone new by gaining information about them. According to Berger, the primary goal of communication is to "make sense" of our social environment. As you

prepare for your first encounter with a stranger, Berger observes that there are at least two different types of doubt you will experience. When you aren't sure on how you should act towards a stranger, one kind of uncertainty deals with behavioural questions. In here, we're going to question whether or not we shake their hands or give out a friendly hug? To reduce the stress that behavioural ambiguity might bring on, there are frequently established procedural guidelines. It goes beyond basic sense to be polite.

A second type of uncertainty centres on cognitive inquiries meant to shed light on the other person's identity as a distinct individual. Your imagination may build up a crazy assortment of probable qualities and attributes when you first meet someone. Acquiring knowledge that enables you to rule out most of these alternatives is necessary for reducing cognitive ambiguity.

In order to clarify how his basic idea of uncertainty connects to eight crucial factors in the establishment of relationships—*verbal communication, nonverbal warmth, information seeking, self-disclosure, reciprocity, likeness, liking, and shared networks*—Berger offers a series of axioms.

Narrative Theory

Walter Fischer was the one who first introduced the Narrative Paradigm. He teaches at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. Fischer is certain that stories influenced by history, society, and character are the

best way to understand all types of communication that appeal to our reason. Humans, he believes, are story-telling creatures that "*see and grasp existence as a series of continuing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends.*" Almost all types of communication, with the exception of direct greetings, jokes, and phatic communication, are viewed by Fisher as stories. He emphasizes his view that there are no communication theories that are merely descriptive or didactic by using the phrase "narrative paradigm" (Em Griffin, 2019:297).

'Narrative' came from the word 'narration' which has the meaning of the telling of a story or an experience bound by the logic of cause and effect that happens in a certain place or time, by revealing a story, an event, or an incident based on the sequence of the events. Using the narrative analysis means assigning texts as a story that is seen a series of events, logics, and sequence of events, parts of events that are selected and thrown away (Eriyanto, 2013:9)

The main function of narrative is to help give meaning into a certain experience, this could be done in two ways which are linking actions in a logical, sequential or reciprocal way. The most important element in narration is the actions by telling a dynamic life in a time series (Keraf, 2010:136).

This theory is used as a guidance in this research for relationship development. Relationships between people who met on online dating apps can be developed into various stages.

Mark Knapp and Julia T. Wood stated that there are 6 stages of relationship development between two people that are already feeling attracted to each other (Weaver II, 1993:495-504): 1) initiating, 2) experimenting, 3) intensifying, 4) integrating, 5) revising, 6) bonding.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To understand the communication experiences of the Indonesian female exchange students that use Tinder abroad and how the relationship develops.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method with a narrative inquiry approach. This research will describe how Indonesian female exchange students give meaning to their relationship through texts on Tinder & within the intercultural communication exchange that happened with their matches, and also the process of the relationship development.

The goal of qualitative descriptive research is to sum up many conditions, circumstances, or social reality phenomena that are present in the society that will serve as the study's subject. It attempts to depict this reality as a characteristic, quality, characteristic, model, indication, or description of a specific condition, circumstance, or phenomena.

As part of this study, the researcher will choose three Indonesian female exchange students who tried the Tinder experience while they were on

a student exchange program who are willing to be interviewed. The informants were chosen because they successfully developed a romantic relationship after using Tinder, also each of them had different and unique experiences before finally developing a romantic relationship. Besides that, each informant had diverse previous experiences with Tinder; some had tried it before their time doing the exchange program while the other had zero experience. The contrasting occurrence of each informant will present a unique point of view towards the topic.

This research uses data in the form of Words and actions of people being interviewed are the primary data type. The researcher recorded the main data type through written notes or recording devices for video/audio tapes, taking photos, or films. The recording of the primary data type through interviews conducted by the researcher with informants results from a combined effort of seeing, hearing, and asking questions and additional written material from written sources is the data type that takes the shape of text and is broken down into sources from archives, personal records, and official documents.

The data collection technique used in this research is the in-depth interview. In-depth interviews were conducted with several Indonesian female students who went on exchange programs. Since this research is qualitative research, the references that were used in the interviews are unstructured. This means that the questions are not fixed on a list of

questions that has been arranged and decided, but rather the questions were improving according to the course of the interview.

The narrative analysis used in this research is based on Riessman and Mishler's method that has been developed, which has been previously done by Berman (1999) to analyze data in critical narrative study towards how Indonesian female exchange students give meaning to their relationship and relationship development on Tinder.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three informants each narrate their own unique experience while using Tinder and develop relationships with someone they knew from Tinder. All three informants were enrolled in a one semester abroad exchange program, but in different locations. All three informants matched with someone who originated from a different country as them and didn't intend to search for something serious at first. But eventually, as they roamed around Tinder, things got interesting and they met people that clicked with them.

While conversing with people on Tinder who all came from various countries, apparently, not everyone came across cultural differences or difficulties. This might be because their matches are people who aesthetically matched their preferences or type, so all three informants came upon different types of men. There were indeed men who asked for sexual favours right away, but there were also many men who

looked forward to building genuine connections through Tinder. Looking at the narratives, it can be discovered that developing a relationship that starts from face-to-face interaction has a very different process than a relationship that stems from Tinder. It is trickier to start a relationship through Tinder due to the system allowing you to match with multiple people, creating a situation where one needs to try to develop a relationship with all of their matches until they fall through one-by-one. When one fails, a person needs to go back to the start to build proximity with other people. Another factor that distinct the two is usually, when meeting someone organically, you already know beforehand a thing or two about them from fellow acquaintances or friends. Meanwhile, people from Tinder are complete strangers. So, the relationship development literally starts from nothing.

Based on Tinder Motivation Scale, or the sequence on people's motive behind using Tinder, the top motivation is for entertainment. This might explain how a relationship on Tinder could escalate into something that is intimate in a very short amount of time, but when commitment is asked, one becomes reluctant. Looking at how all three informants downloaded Tinder without real reason and didn't expect to obtain anything from the dating application, this may go the same way to their matches. This could pretty much explain why getting commitment out of Tinder needs a very long process, even when they're clearly already smitten and intimate with each other. In addition, the research has shown

how the Indonesian girls were open to be intimate with their matches way beyond what is considered normal in the Indonesian culture and customs. But in the end, most of the informants settle for a no label relationship, which can be seen as something in between casual and committed.

As mentioned above, while texting, not everyone comes across cultural shock or difficulties. For the others, the cultural shock or difficulties only occur when she already spent some time with them and figured out their habits. After spending time and corresponding with someone who came from a different culture, for some people, it can be noticed that it's hard to find the middle ground to different points of views and habits. It could heavily affect your relationship since the person you're with has a different way of thinking shaped by their own culture. But there were also people who chose to try to understand and adapt to the foreign culture, resulting in minimal to no-issue at all. Furthermore, long distance turns out to be a huge issue for couples. The time difference and distance seem to interrupt the communication patterns between couples. Even though the couples could still communicate with each other through screen, nothing could beat the feeling of nonverbal warmth that could be emitted to one another.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Theoretical Implication

Based on the research of understanding the communication experiences of Indonesian female students in the romantic relationship

development process that is formed by using Tinder abroad, which uses four theoretical foundation 1) Coordinated management meaning theory, 2) Symbolic interactionism theory, 3) Uncertainty reduction theory, and 4) Narrative theory it can brings further discussion in how people develop relationship solely depending on online interaction to get to know each other. This can bring on new perspectives on how people give meaning to their interaction online within an intercultural context, and develop relationships from it.

2. Practical Implication

By the findings of this research, it can give the conclusion of understanding the communication experiences of Indonesian female students in the romantic relationship development process that is formed by using Tinder abroad. The object of this research is Indonesian female university students who were enrolled in an exchange program abroad for one semester and used Tinder until developing a real relationship with their match. It gives an additional perspective on how meaning is given in relationship development through interpersonal online relationships within an intercultural context.

3. Social Implication

Based on the result of this research, it could give people more understanding towards giving meaning in the process of building connection through texts with the people you know from Tinder, and how throughout developing a relationship with people from

different cultures, how they act and how they think plays a big role.

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