THE NARRATIVE OF ONLINE DATING APPS IN RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT DURING COVID 2020

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami perubahan perilaku pengguna aplikasi kencan online, khususnya bagaimana mereka menyesuaikan diri dengan hambatan perpisahan fisik dengan memperluas ketergantungan mereka pada yang menyiratkan untuk bertemu dengan orang yang tidak digunakan dan menjaga koneksi. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan pendekatan naratif. Teknik analisis data menggunakan metode naratif Todorov. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara, dengan melibatkan empat informan yang merupakan mahasiswa Universitas Diponegoro yang aktif menggunakan aplikasi kencan online selama COVID 2020. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa: (1) keempat informan skeptic terhadap aplikasi kencan daring sebelum menggunakannya, tetapi kemudian mereka menggunakannya karena rasa ingin tahu, kebosanan, atau tekanan teman sebaya; (2) kesan pertama keempat informan adalah mereka menyukai fitur swipe, tetapi kesulitan dalam membuat profil; (3) dua informan berubah dari kasual menjadi komitmen setelah keluarga dan teman terlibat, sementara dua informan lainnya adalah kecocokan dan chemistry yang tinggi; (4) dua informan lebih menyukai komunikasi yang langsung dan lugas, sementara dua informan lainnya lebih menyukai komunikasi yang terbuka dan jujur; dan (5) keempat informan mampu membangun hubungan yang bermakna terutama dari pertemuan langsung.

Kata Kunci: Aplikasi Kencan Virtual, Perkembangan Hubungan, Naratif

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the behavioral changes of online dating apps users, particularly how they adjusted to the impediments of physical separation by expanding their dependence on advanced implies for meeting unused individuals and keeping up connections. This study is a qualitative research that employs narrative approach. The data analysis technique using Todorov's narrative method. The data are collected through observations and interviews, involving four informants who are students of Diponegoro University who actively using online dating apps during COVID 2020. The result of this study shows that: (1) the four informants are skeptical of online dating apps before using it, but then they use it out of curiosity, boredom, or peer pressure; (2) the first impression of the four informants are they like swiping features, but struggle in creating a profile; (3) two informants move from casual to commitment once family and friends are involved, while the

other two informants' triggers are high compatibility and chemistry; (4) two informants prefer a direct and straightforward communication, while the other two informants prefer an open and honest communication; and (5) the four informants are able to build meaningful connection mainly from in-person meetings.

Keywords: *Online Dating Apps, Relationship Development, Narrative*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 widespread has had a significant effect on different angles of our day by day lives, counting the way we approach interpersonal connections and the interest of sentimental associations. The social separating measures and lockdowns executed to control the spread of the infection have driven a critical move in how individuals explore the dating scene, especially through the utilization of online dating applications.

The widespread use has sped up the trend toward smart and virtual dating (Wu et al., 2021). As physical intimacy got to be constrained, numerous people turned to online stages as a means to put through with potential romantic accomplices, driving to a surge within the utilization of dating apps. According to (Mancl & Fraser, 2020), the widespread has driven digitalization in various ranges, counting work, utilization, social associations, and diversion. This is often evidenced by the expanded notoriety of virtual dates, video calls, and other online engagement exercises as individuals looked for ways to preserve connections and investigate modern sentimental prospects amid the widespread (Mancl & Fraser, 2020).

The widespread highlighted the potential preferences and downsides of online dating. Whereas dating apps have given a helpful and moderate way for people to meet and connect, they have too confronted feedback for their restrictions in encouraging honest to goodness associations and enthusiastic closeness. Investigate on adolescent young ladies in Canada found that whereas online stages encouraged associations, members moreover reflected on the disadvantages of being able to associate as it were for all intents and purposes, proposing the ought to superior get it the impacts of COVID-19 limitations on dating connections and related mental and passionate wellbeing impacts (Goldstein & Flash, 2020).

Besides, the widespread influence has excessively influenced

certain statistical groups, including the elderly, who may have confronted extra challenges in navigating the advanced scene of online dating. The concept of "advanced untouchables" has risen, highlighting the challenges confronted by those who are less innovatively adroit or have constrained access to digital assets, underscoring the require for more comprehensive and available approaches to online dating and social interactions amid times of emergency (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

The number of downloads and users of dating apps follow different trends. According to data from (Rizqiyah, 2023), the number of dating app users is steadily increasing. This means that dating apps are still widely used around the world today. Dating apps generated $4.94 billion in revenue in 2022. Match Group, which operates several dating apps such as Tinder, Meetic, Match.com, and Upward, contributed 3.1 billion US dollars to the total. Meanwhile, Tinder generated $1.79 billion in revenue in the same year (Rizqiyah, 2023).

The online dating landscape in Indonesia has undergone remarkable changes in recent years, driven by the rapid growth of internet and smartphone usage across the country. Since 2020, the rise of mobile dating apps has become a significant phenomenon, changing the way Indonesians socialize and form romantic relationships (Sunarsono et al., 2018). Internet and smartphone usage in Indonesia has been steadily increasing, with the country's internet usage reaching 73.7 percent of the total population in the second quarter of 2020 (Naomi & Ardhiyansyah, 2021). This digital revolution has led to a surge in the adoption of various e-commerce and digital services, including the use of online dating applications (Tasrifan, 2018).

In conclusion, the COVID-19 widespread has essentially reshaped the scene of online dating, speeding up the move towards smart and virtual interactions. Whereas dating apps have given a helpful way for people to investigate sentimental associations, the widespread has too uncovered the obstacle and potential disadvantages of these stages, especially in creating real emotional connections and helping vulnerable groups. As we explore the long-term suggestions of the widespread, it will be vital to address the advancing

flow of online dating and create procedures to ensure that the advanced dating scene is inclusive.

The sudden change in the situation led the author to conduct a study on "The Phenomenon of Online Dating Apps in Relations of The COVID-19 Pandemic 2020" Understanding how digital platforms mediate human interactions during times of crisis. The pandemic has significantly restricted face-to-face communication and forced a shift to online dating apps as the primary venue for socializing and relationship building.

The move towards advanced interaction was quickened by the pandemic, making online platforms essential for social interaction. The dependence on online dating apps gave a novel setting for relationship advancement where beginning intelligence and holding happened online, without the plausibility of physical interaction. This circumstance offers an unmistakable opportunity to investigate whether delayed online intuitive sometimes assembly in individuals can lead to more profound enthusiastic associations and superior understanding between accomplices.

Moreover, as limitations facilitated and individuals returned to more conventional shapes of social interaction, it is imperative to look at how these connections transitioned from online to offline settings. Understanding how connections that started online amid the widespread have advanced within the modern ordinary can give experiences into the flexibility and challenges of these connections compared to those shaped pre-pandemic. This inquire about looks for to supply important bits of knowledge for both clients and engineers of dating apps, educating future plans and direction for people exploring relationship improvement in digital context

This study contributes to the broader communication field by centering on the elements of virtual intelligence in times of physical confinement and examining their suggestions for future computerized communication practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative narrative approach to explore how individuals engaged in online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Narrative methods allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, emotional journeys, and the impact of pandemic restrictions on relationship development. By collecting and analyzing personal stories, the study examines themes like loneliness, adaptation to virtual dating, and changing relationship goals (Riessman, 2008).

Data is collected through interviews and observations of four Diponegoro University students who used dating apps during the pandemic. The study includes two heterosexual and two LGBTQ couples to ensure diversity. Observations focus on participants' interactions on dating apps, including virtual dates, while interviews are recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

The study applies narrative analysis to examine participants' personal stories and Todorov's narrative theory to understand relationship progression during the pandemic (Todorov, 1971). This framework identifies a during pandemic equilibrium, pandemic-induced disruption, and post-pandemic resolution, revealing how dating norms evolved. By comparing different narratives, the research highlights the psychological, emotional, and technological shifts in online dating due to COVID-19.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
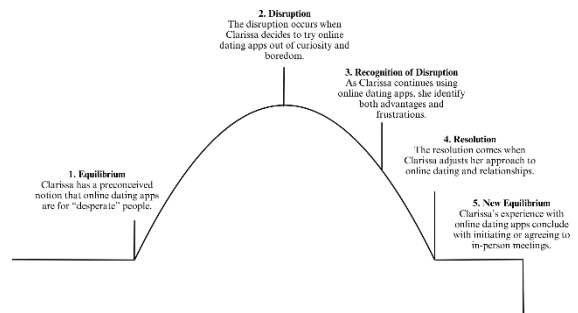
Clarissa's Dating Narrative

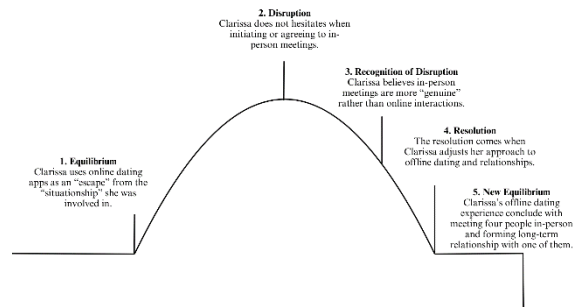**Figure 1.** Clarissa's online dating narrative

Figure 2. Clarissa's offline dating narrative

Clarissa, a 22-year-old student at Diponegoro University, has experienced the evolution of online dating before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Living in a bustling city, she relied on dating apps like Bumble to connect with others, especially during

lockdowns when face-to-face interactions were limited.

Throughout her journey, she faced challenges such as building emotional intimacy without in-person meetings and the uncertainty of transitioning virtual connections into real-life relationships. Despite these struggles, Clarissa adapted by embracing video calls and long text conversations, remaining hopeful about finding meaningful connections.

In an interview, she reflects on how online dating shaped relationship development during social isolation, sharing insights into the shift from virtual interactions to in-person dynamics in a post-pandemic world.
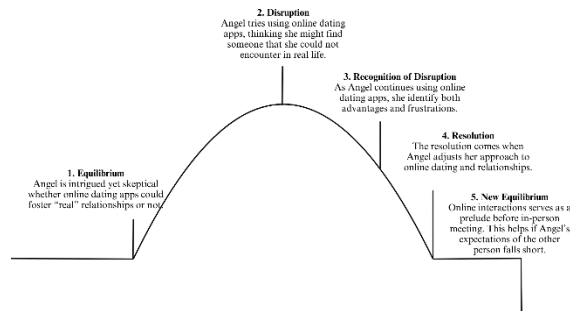
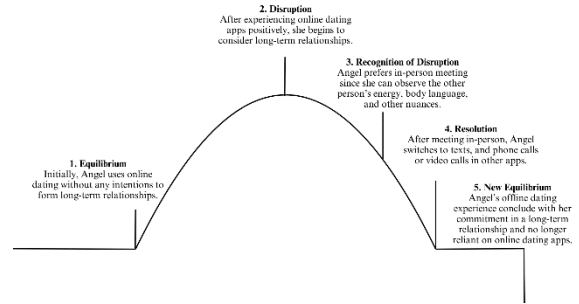**Angel's Dating Narrative**

Figure 3. Angel's online dating narrative

Angel, a 21-year-old student at Diponegoro University, turned to online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic to combat isolation while balancing her studies. Living in Semarang, she explored platforms like Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid, initially as a way to break the monotony but eventually in search of meaningful connections.

With physical interactions limited, Angel focused on building emotional intimacy, trust, and communication through video calls, audio messages, and shared online activities. However, transitioning these virtual connections into real-life meetings after restrictions eased presented challenges, such as managing expectations and adjusting to in-person dynamics.

In an interview, Angel reflects on how the pandemic reshaped her approach to dating, emphasizing the

Figure 4. Angel's offline dating narrative

contrast between digital and physical connections and the evolving nature of relationships in a post-pandemic world. Her experiences offer insight into how young people navigate online dating amid global uncertainty.
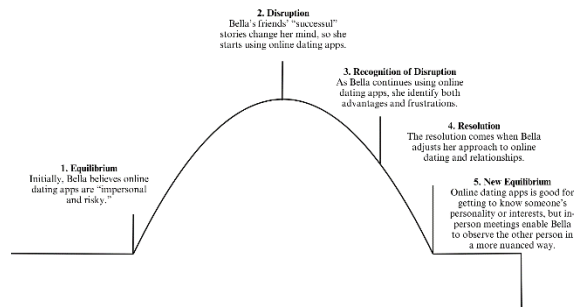
Bella's Dating Narrative

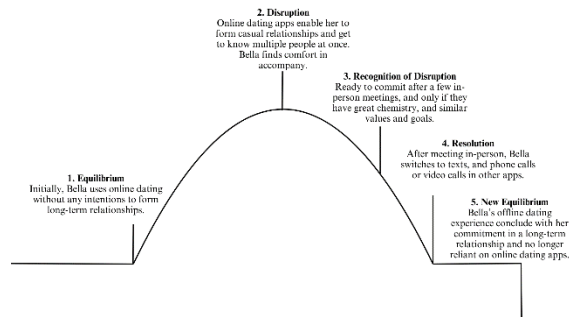**Figure 5.** Bella's online dating narrative
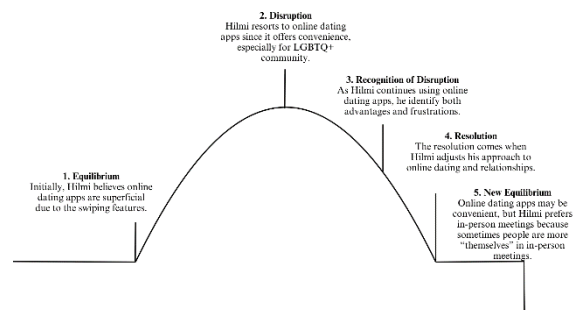
Figure 6. Bella's offline dating narrative

Bella, a 21-year-old student at Diponegoro University, turned to online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic to cope with isolation in Semarang. Initially curious, she explored platforms like Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid, but her casual experimentation soon became

a search for meaningful connections. With in-person interactions restricted, she focused on emotional intimacy, communication, and trust-building through video calls, voice messages, and virtual activities.

While these digital interactions often deepened relationships, transitioning from online to in-person meetings after restrictions eased presented challenges. Bella had to manage expectations, adjust to real-life dynamics, and reconcile online personas with reality.

Reflecting on her journey, she realized the pandemic reshaped her perspective on dating, emphasizing patience, honesty, and adaptability. She also noted how dating apps evolved from being an option to a crucial tool for connection. Her experience highlights the resilience of young adults navigating relationships in a world transformed by global uncertainty.

Hilmi's Dating Narrative

Figure 7. Hilmi's online dating narrative
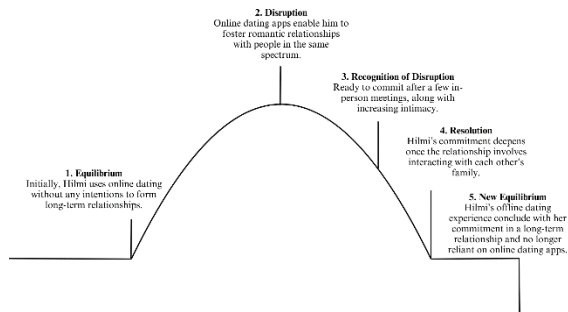
Figure 8. Hilmi's offline dating narrative

Hilmi, a 21-year-old student at Diponegoro University, explored online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic while navigating his identity as a gay man in Semarang. Initially using Tinder, Bumble, and Grindr to escape lockdown monotony, he soon found deeper connections and self-discovery through these platforms.

With physical meetings restricted, Hilmi prioritized emotional depth over casual encounters, engaging in long conversations, late-night video calls, and shared online activities. Even Grindr, typically known for hookups, became a space for meaningful discussions about life, identity, and isolation.

As restrictions lifted, transitioning from virtual to in-person meetings posed challenges, requiring him to manage expectations and navigate the differences between online personas and real-life chemistry. Some meetings exceeded his hopes, while others highlighted the complexities of digital relationships.

Post-pandemic, Hilmi's view on dating shifted—he now values communication, honesty, and emotional effort over physical intimacy. His journey reflects the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in times of crisis, showing how technology can both challenge and enrich the search for meaningful connections. For Hilmi, the pandemic was not just a disruption but a transformative period of self-growth and deeper relationship-building.

Before Using Online Dating Apps

The decision to use online dating apps is shaped by personal motivations, social influences, and the convenience of technology. Many individuals turn to these platforms out of curiosity, frustration with traditional dating methods, or the need for a safe and discreet space, especially in marginalized communities like LGBTQ+ populations. While some initially doubt the authenticity of online relationships, the accessibility and customization

features of dating apps often alleviate these concerns.

Challenges in using these platforms include skepticism about meaningful connections, safety and privacy concerns, and societal stigma. Users overcome these issues by leveraging app features like filters, identity verification, and strategic communication methods. Changing societal attitudes and increased digital interaction also help normalize online dating.

Despite initial hesitations, many users find value in dating apps for expanding their social and romantic possibilities. Their experiences highlight the evolving role of technology in modern relationships, showcasing adaptability and strategic approaches in navigating online dating.

The decision-making process in online dating can be understood through three key theoretical lenses:

1. Social Information Processing Theory explains how users adapt to limited online cues (e.g., text messages, profile pictures) to form impressions and relationships over time. It highlights how asynchronous communication allows users to craft messages carefully, reducing skepticism toward online dating.

2. Relationship Development Theory describes how individuals move from casual interactions to deeper connections. It highlights the role of compatibility filters and personal disclosure in overcoming skepticism and fostering meaningful relationships.

3. Social Presence Theory focuses on perceived intimacy in digital interactions. While online dating can feel impersonal, interactive features like video calls and messaging enhance connection, making the experience more engaging.

First Impression and Usage

The first impressions and initial experiences of online dating app users highlight a diverse range of reactions, challenges, and adaptive strategies. Clarissa, for instance, initially felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of matches but found the experience empowering as it introduced her to people beyond her usual social circles. While she was initially skeptical about the superficiality of online dating, she quickly adapted by using filters to narrow down her matches based on

shared interests and goals.

Similarly, Angel approached online dating with hesitation, believing it to be impersonal and lacking depth. However, as she explored the platforms further, she realized the advantages of being able to filter potential matches based on values and interests, which gave her a sense of control over the dating process. Bella, in contrast, began using dating apps in a relaxed and casual manner, viewing them as a source of entertainment rather than a serious avenue for forming connections. However, as she encountered different types of interactions, she became more selective, prioritizing profiles that showed genuine effort and intent. Meanwhile, Hilmi's experience was shaped by his identity as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, as he viewed these apps as a crucial space for self-expression and connection. While he initially associated apps like Grindr with casual encounters, he eventually sought more meaningful relationships and transitioned to platforms like Bumble that better aligned with his goals.

Despite these varied first impressions, a common challenge among the informants was navigating the balance between authenticity and the curated nature of online dating. Many struggled with the pressure to present themselves in a way that stood out while remaining true to their real personalities. Clarissa, for instance, refined her approach by crafting a profile that accurately reflected her character while strategically filtering matches. Bella and Angel similarly adjusted their strategies, learning how to express their values and intentions in subtle but meaningful ways. Hilmi emphasized the importance of transitioning from online interactions to in-person meetings, believing that genuine chemistry could only be confirmed through face-to-face encounters. Over time, the informants refined their methods for establishing meaningful connections, moving past the initial awkwardness of online dating. They became more intentional about their interactions, distinguishing between superficial engagements and those with long-term potential.

The evolution of their experiences aligns with several theoretical perspectives that explain online dating behaviors. Social information processing theory illustrates how users gradually learn to

communicate more effectively despite the lack of nonverbal cues, which is evident in how Clarissa, Bella, and Angel refined their messaging strategies. Relationship development theory further supports the idea that online dating interactions progress through stages, with informants moving from casual exploration to deeper emotional connections through consistent communication. Additionally, social presence theory highlights how features such as messaging and video calls help create a sense of intimacy, reducing the initial sense of detachment associated with digital dating. Ultimately, as informants continued to engage with the apps, they overcame their initial uncertainties by adjusting their expectations and communication strategies, allowing them to form more authentic and meaningful relationships. Their experiences reflect the dynamic nature of online dating, where first impressions are only a starting point in the journey toward genuine connection.

The three theoretical lenses explain how individuals adapt to online dating platforms to form meaningful connections.

1. Social Information Processing Theory suggests that, despite the lack of non-verbal cues, users refine their written communication to build trust and rapport over time (Walther, 1996). Initially, users may struggle with superficial interactions but learn to engage in deeper conversations to establish genuine connections.

2. Relationship Development Theory describes how individuals transition from casual encounters to deeper emotional bonds by refining their profiles and communication styles, overcoming initial hesitations to express their true selves (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005).

3. Social Presence Theory highlights the growing sense of emotional connection and presence that users develop as they engage with the platform, moving from superficial exchanges to meaningful relationships (Short et al., 1976).

Casual to Commitment

The journey from casual interactions to committed relationships in online dating is often complex and unpredictable. While some individuals successfully found supportive and emotionally committed partners who shared their long-term goals, others

encountered challenges due to differing intentions and superficial connections. Some informants expressed frustration over partners who initially appeared committed but ultimately failed to invest consistent effort in the relationship. However, those who transitioned successfully into committed relationships emphasized the importance of clear communication, shared values, and mutual respect as foundational elements in fostering deeper connections (Finkel et al., 2012). These experiences highlight both the hurdles and transformative potential of relationships built through online platforms (Ellison et al., 2006).

In the early stages of online dating, many users approached the experience with a casual mindset, often viewing it as an opportunity to explore potential connections without serious expectations. One informant described initially using dating apps to "test the waters" rather than actively seeking a committed relationship. However, as users engaged more deeply with these platforms, some experienced moments of connection that shifted their perspective. For instance, one individual described how a second real-life meeting with someone they met on Bumble changed their outlook on the possibility of forming a serious relationship (Finkel et al., 2012). These turning points were often linked to specific behaviors, such as consistent communication, shared values, and mutual efforts to prioritize the relationship.

Despite these positive experiences, many users struggled with the superficiality of some interactions and the difficulty of aligning intentions with potential partners. Some informants expressed frustration with matches who seemed more interested in validation or entertainment rather than forming a genuine connection. To address these challenges, many individuals adopted proactive strategies, such as initiating clear and honest conversations about relationship goals early in the dating process. One informant emphasized the importance of directly asking a potential partner about their intentions, which helped save time and emotional energy while fostering a foundation of trust and transparency (Walther, 1996). Additionally, informants highlighted the importance of transitioning from online

communication to in-person meetings, as face-to-face interactions provided deeper insights into compatibility through non-verbal cues and real-time engagement.

The transition from casual dating to a committed relationship was often marked by gradual trust-building and mutual investment. Informants who successfully made this shift frequently took intentional steps, such as deleting dating apps as a symbol of commitment or introducing their partner to friends and family. These actions signified a shared willingness to build a serious relationship. While each informant's journey was unique, common themes emerged, including emotional connection, aligned goals, and overcoming challenges together. Their experiences underscore both the difficulties and rewards of transforming casual online interactions into meaningful, lasting relationships (Gibbs et al., 2011).

One of the key challenges in this transition was the ambiguity of intentions among dating app users. Some individuals sought casual encounters or validation, while others were interested in long-term commitments. This discrepancy often led to confusion and frustration, especially for those hoping to take their relationships to a more serious level. One informant shared their disappointment in a partner who initially showed interest but hesitated when discussing exclusivity, making it difficult to establish trust and move forward. Additionally, many informants noted that online interactions often created an idealized image of a potential partner, leading to mismatched expectations upon meeting in person (Finkel et al., 2012).

To navigate these challenges, informants employed various strategies to facilitate a smoother transition into committed relationships. Clear and direct communication about relationship goals was particularly effective in establishing mutual understanding early on. Informants who openly discussed their expectations found it easier to filter out incompatible matches and focus on partners who were genuinely interested in commitment. Another crucial factor was prioritizing offline interactions, as in-person meetings provided valuable insights into a partner's personality and communication style, fostering a stronger emotional connection.

Building trust and mutual understanding also played a significant role in overcoming obstacles associated with online dating. Small but meaningful actions, such as consistent communication, sharing personal experiences, and integrating partners into one's social circle, helped reinforce commitment and stability in the relationship. For example, one informant highlighted how their partner's willingness to introduce them to close friends and family solidified their confidence in the relationship's long-term potential. Additionally, some informants found success by shifting communication to more personal platforms, such as WhatsApp, where interactions felt more natural and intimate.

In conclusion, while transitioning from casual dating to a committed relationship on an online dating app presents numerous challenges, individuals who demonstrated resilience and intentional effort were able to build lasting connections. Through clear communication, prioritizing in-person meetings, and fostering mutual trust, informants successfully navigated the complexities of modern online dating.

Their experiences highlight the importance of aligning intentions, maintaining consistent effort, and embracing the evolving nature of digital relationships (Gibbs et al., 2011).

The transition from casual dating to a committed relationship in online dating can be understood through three key theories:

1. Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory explains how individuals form connections in digital environments despite limited non-verbal cues. Through sustained and meaningful communication, online daters build trust and understanding over time, compensating for the absence of physical presence.

2. Relationship Development Theory outlines the progression from initial attraction to commitment, emphasizing how mutual disclosure and shared experiences foster intimacy. Online daters integrate digital interactions with in-person meetings and social circle involvement to strengthen their bond.

3. Social Presence Theory highlights the importance of perceived authenticity in digital interactions. To enhance intimacy, individuals

transition to platforms with richer communication features (e.g., WhatsApp) and prioritize direct contact.

Communication in Relationship

Communication plays a vital role in the development of relationships through online dating apps, acting as both a bridge and a challenge for users seeking meaningful connections. Many individuals experience initial difficulties in establishing genuine connections due to the often superficial nature of early digital conversations, leading to misunderstandings about intentions and expectations. Some users struggle with inconsistent communication patterns, which can create doubts about a partner's sincerity and long-term commitment. However, for those who engage in clear and direct conversations about relationship goals, communication serves as a foundation for deeper connections. Informants highlight the importance of transitioning from text-based communication to voice and video calls, allowing for a better understanding of personality and emotional cues. Ultimately, successful relationships depend on open dialogue, consistent effort, and mutual honesty,

demonstrating that while dating apps facilitate connections, the quality of communication determines the strength of the relationship.

Building a relationship through online dating apps presents unique challenges, particularly due to the lack of non-verbal cues and the potential for misunderstandings. Many users find that digital conversations can feel shallow or fail to convey true intentions, leading to mismatched expectations. Some individuals experience frustration when their partners initially seem engaged but later become inconsistent, creating uncertainty and emotional distress. The absence of face-to-face interaction further complicates the ability to assess sincerity. However, users who prioritize open communication and establish clear expectations early on tend to experience more positive outcomes. Transitioning from texting to voice or video calls allows for better emotional expression and helps bridge the gap left by digital communication limitations. Additionally, meeting in person solidifies trust and provides deeper insights into a partner's character. These experiences underscore the need for honesty, consistency, and adaptability in

fostering strong online relationships.

Open communication is essential in navigating the complexities of online dating, requiring a strategic approach that incorporates technology, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. Many informants found success by openly discussing relationship goals and communication preferences early on, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings. Utilizing diverse communication tools, such as voice and video calls, helps individuals build trust and gauge compatibility more effectively than text-based interactions alone. Additionally, improving digital literacy and emotional intelligence allows users to interpret messages more accurately and avoid unnecessary conflicts. Addressing issues like ghosting and inconsistent communication requires resilience and proactive engagement, encouraging a culture of respectful and clear communication. The transition to face-to-face meetings remains a crucial step in solidifying relationships, as physical interactions provide clarity on emotional and behavioral cues. Consistency and shared responsibility in communication further strengthen bonds, reinforcing the importance of sustained effort in relationship-building. By fostering openness, adaptability, and emotional awareness, individuals can navigate online dating more effectively, ultimately forming lasting and meaningful connections.

The three theoretical lenses offer valuable insights into how communication shapes relationship building in digital contexts.

1. Social Information Processing Theory emphasizes that despite the lack of nonverbal cues in online interactions, individuals can still form deep connections through strategic and intentional text-based communication. Over time, users adapt by sharing personal stories and discussing values, allowing them to build meaningful relationships. This aligns with informants' experiences, where gradually deepening conversations helped establish emotional bonds even in digital settings.

2. Relationship Development Theory focuses on how relationships evolve from superficial interactions to deeper emotional connections through consistent and purposeful communication. Informants who

transitioned from casual small talk to more profound discussions about life goals and future aspirations demonstrated this theory in action. It highlights that sustained engagement and meaningful dialogue are essential for fostering commitment in digital relationships.

3. Social Presence Theory underscores the importance of perceived warmth and intimacy in online interactions. Informants who incorporated voice notes and video calls into their conversations reported feeling more connected and emotionally engaged with their partners. This theory suggests that using richer communication tools enhances trust and closeness, overcoming some of the limitations of text-based exchanges.

Meaningful Connection

Meaningful connections in online dating depend heavily on effective communication, yet many informants faced challenges in fostering these bonds. Initial conversations often felt engaging but lacked depth, leading to misunderstandings about intentions and missed opportunities for deeper relationships. Unclear communication and inconsistent messaging created doubts about reliability and sincerity, preventing emotional intimacy from developing. Many informants expressed frustration over the superficiality of early interactions, where physical attraction dominated discussions rather than emotional compatibility. These barriers made them question whether true, meaningful relationships could be formed in a virtual setting.

To build meaningful connections, informants found that intentional and open communication was essential. Some overcame initial struggles by directly discussing relationship goals early on, helping them avoid mismatched expectations. Others emphasized emotional vulnerability and honesty in conversations, which fostered deeper bonds with those who shared similar values. Transitioning from text-based chats to voice or video calls also proved beneficial, as it allowed for a richer understanding of emotions and personalities. Face-to-face meetings further solidified these connections, helping informants assess their partners' authenticity and deepen their trust.

Establishing meaningful relationships through online dating also

requires proactive strategies. Clear and direct communication about intentions from the beginning can prevent misunderstandings and disappointment. Engaging in deeper conversations about values, aspirations, and emotional needs fosters a stronger connection beyond surface-level attraction. Moving beyond digital interactions by arranging in-person meetings strengthens intimacy by incorporating non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions. Additionally, emotional vulnerability and consistent effort play crucial roles in nurturing a bond, as they demonstrate sincerity and commitment to the relationship.

Ultimately, meaningful connections in online dating stem from thoughtful communication, emotional investment, and consistent engagement. By prioritizing openness, deeper conversations, face-to-face meetings, and ongoing effort, individuals can navigate digital dating more successfully and cultivate lasting, fulfilling relationships.

The concept of meaningful connection in online dating can be understood through three key theoretical lenses.

1. Social information processing theory explains that despite the absence of non-verbal cues in digital communication, individuals can still form deep relationships by strategically sharing personal information and fostering emotional intimacy through text-based or digital interactions. Consistency and thoughtful dialogue play a crucial role in building trust, as users adapt to the constraints of online communication (Walther, 1992).

2. Relationship development theory focuses on the progressive nature of relationship formation, emphasizing how connections evolve from casual interactions to committed relationships. This theory highlights the significance of self-disclosure, emotional vulnerability, and mutual understanding as key factors in strengthening bonds between individuals. As online relationships develop, intentional communication and the willingness to share personal experiences help deepen the connection (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

3. Social presence theory complements these perspectives by stressing the importance of creating a sense of intimacy and emotional closeness in

digital interactions. It suggests that increasing social presence through rich communication methods—such as voice and video calls—can enhance the perceived authenticity of an online connection. By fostering a feeling of "being there" despite physical distance, this approach strengthens emotional depth and trust (Short et al., 1976).

CONCLUSION

Online dating apps have significantly transformed modern relationship dynamics by providing a platform for relationship initiation and development. While these apps offer unprecedented opportunities to connect, success depends on users' ability to navigate digital communication effectively. Open and honest communication is crucial in fostering emotional intimacy and overcoming misunderstandings. The transition from online to offline interactions plays a critical role in determining relationship success, requiring intentional effort, authenticity, and shared values. Additionally, the shift from casual dating to committed relationships is influenced by clarity of intentions, consistency, and mutual investment. Ultimately, while online dating serves as a springboard for relationships, lasting

connections are built through sustained effort beyond digital interactions.

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