



Psychological Dynamics of Social Interaction in Face-to-Face and Digital Communication

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Abstract

The present work addresses the areas of interest of psychology that concern social interactions and the roles of cognitive processes, affective states, nonverbal behaviors, and cultural values in interactions. Interaction affects human aspects such as the relationship between two persons or entities, and organization of societies. The distinct notion of this research topic is based on modern people's understanding of how digital communication stands in relation to face-to-face communication in present society. The study employs qualitative interviews and observations of people and communities to examine the roles of empathy, fear or distrust to interpersonal and social cognition. Further, it looks at the part played by perception and attribution in determining behavior and the judgments people make about others, in different settings. Conflict recognition and escalation are also extensively covered in this paper as well as possible body language, facial expressions, and tone of voices as lenses of meaning-making in social interactions. In addition, culture and social relations are taken into account when defining how various environments define interaction between people. The survey results add to the existing body of knowledge regarding social behavior of man especially given the advent of social media. This study thus fills the research gaps of investigating the methods through which digital interaction affects human relations, in light of the reviewed research findings above. This work shows that social behavior is a complex domain of study, and that understanding human action means not only considering how people relate to one another, but also how their brains process information about the social world.

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social creatures, and our interactions function the cornerstone of our existence (Sarbaitinil et al., 2023). Human beings are inherently social creatures, and our interactions function the cornerstone of our existence. From the instant we take our first breath, we are thrust into a global wherein relationships, both fleeting and enduring, form the contours of our truth (Gumbs, 2021). The look at of the psychology of social interaction is a quest to decipher the intricacies of these relationships, examining the cognitive tactics that pressure our know-how of others, the emotional responses that color our interactions, and the behavioral patterns that become an end result. This exploration isn't simply an academic endeavor; it's far an exploration of the very essence of what it means to be human (Baía et al., 2022).

In the problematic tapestry of human life, the threads of social interaction weave a narrative that shapes our perceptions, impacts our behaviors, and basically defines the essence of our interconnectedness (Costabile et al., 2020). The psychology of social interaction is a multifaceted area that delves into the complex dynamics of the way people have interaction with each other, exploring the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that underpin human connection (Sheford, 2023). As we navigate the complicated landscape of social

interactions, it becomes imperative to resolve the underlying strategies that govern those exchanges and realise the profound effect they wield on our properly-being, mental health, and societal structures (Srivastava, 2023).

The advent of the digital age has ushered in a new era of social interplay, remodeling the panorama in exceptional methods (Qureshi, 2024). Social media systems, digital groups, and on-line forums have extended the boundaries of our social sphere, supplying avenues for connection that transcend geographical barriers. As we navigate this virtual frontier, it becomes vital to scrutinize the impact of these technological shifts on the mental underpinnings of human connection (Singh et al., 2024). Are our virtual interactions as meaningful as face-to-face encounters? How do online platforms form our perceptions of self and others (Ellis & Tucker, 2020). These questions underscore the evolving nature of the psychology of social interplay in an unexpectedly changing global.

The mental intricacies of social interaction show up on numerous degrees, from individual cognition to organization dynamics (Fett, et al., 2022). Understanding the cognitive approaches involved in social belief is paramount to unraveling the complexities of human connection. Social cognition, encompassing techniques consisting of attribution, impact formation, and angle-taking, dictates how we interpret the actions and intentions of others (Sheford, 2023). As researchers delve into the cognitive structure of social interactions, they illuminate the approaches in which our minds assemble the social fact we inhabit.

Emotions function an effective lens thru which we revel in and navigate the social global (Scott, et al., 2020). The emotional landscape of social interactions is sizeable and nuanced, starting from the warmth of empathy to the chill of social rejection. Exploring the emotional dimensions of human connection involves analyzing the position of empathy, emotional contagion, and the effect of social guide on man or woman well-being (Kaluzeviciute, 2020). Moreover, know-how how emotions shape social behaviors sheds mild on the mechanisms that force cooperation, warfare, and the formation of social bonds.

Behavioral styles in social interactions embody a huge spectrum, encompassing verbal and nonverbal conversation, conformity, aggression, altruism, and greater (Boldsen, 2021). Observing and studying those behaviors affords valuable insights into the social forces that govern our movements (Rodrigues et al., 2021). Social have an impact on, conformity, and the factors that make contributions to the emergence of social norms are integral additives of the behavioral elements of human interplay. Whether it's miles the subtle cues of nonverbal conversation or the overt expressions of altruism, every conduct contributes to the elaborate dance of social dynamics (Deng, et al., 2023).

The look at of social interaction extends beyond individual psychology to embody the dynamics of companies and communities (Deng et al., 2023). Social identity concept, group concord, and intergroup dynamics offer frameworks for information how individuals define themselves when it comes to social classes and how organization affiliations form behavior. Exploring the interaction between person and collective identities unveils the complexities of societal systems, losing light on troubles of prejudice, discrimination, and social concord.

Method

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the psychological dynamics underlying social interactions, focusing on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors that shape human connection. To gather in-depth insights, the researcher utilized a combination of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 purposively selected participants, ensuring diversity in age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. These interviews aimed to uncover personal experiences of social

interaction, focusing on the cognitive processes, emotional responses, and behavioral patterns that occur in both physical and digital settings. In addition to interviews, three focus groups, each consisting of 6-8 participants, were organized to stimulate group discussions about social interactions. The group setting allowed participants to share experiences, debate perceptions, and reflect on emotions related to both online and offline social interactions. Finally, the researcher engaged in participant observation within natural social settings such as community events, public spaces, and online platforms, capturing non-verbal cues and group behaviors through field notes and video recordings.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who could provide varied and rich insights into the research topic. This ensured representation across different social environments and levels of engagement, including both highly active social media users and those with limited digital interaction. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a process that involved coding significant segments of data, grouping codes into broader themes, and refining these themes to capture the nuances of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of social interaction. Key themes such as "The Emotional Impact of Social Media," "Social Cognition in Face-to-Face Interactions," and "Nonverbal Communication in Group Dynamics" were identified. The findings were reported through a narrative that integrated direct quotations from participants to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological processes involved in social interactions.

Result and Discussion

Human communication can be described as individual and intricate since different cognition, emotions, social signals determine how people perceive each other. In the context of the growing importance of digital communications, with less frequent live interpersonal interactions, the study of emotion depth, behavioral signs and cultural differences between live and digital interactions seems pertinent. This research aims at filling these gaps focusing will look at these elements in both the physical environment and the virtual environment to enhance understanding of the activities at play in human bonding. The subsequent section encircles the results, which provide fresh perceptions to the moments of emotions, perceptions, nonverbal communications, and cultural norms which influence or direct social relations.

Exploration of How Emotions such as Empathy, Fear, and Trust Influence Social Interactions

Emotions play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of social interactions. Key emotions such as empathy, fear, and trust significantly influence how individuals connect with one another, navigate social spaces, and form or break relationships. These emotions not only affect interpersonal exchanges but also shape the broader social environment in which individuals operate. This section explores the role of these emotions in social interactions, drawing insights from the data collected through interviews and observations.

Empathy is an emotion that fosters understanding and connection between individuals. It involves the ability to share and understand the feelings of another, which strengthens interpersonal bonds and promotes prosocial behaviors. Many interviewees highlighted how empathy enabled them to form deeper connections with others. One participant stated,

"When I understand how someone else is feeling, especially in tough times, I feel more connected to them. Empathy makes me want to help them, and it builds a sense of trust and closeness."

This emotional connection was noted not only in face-to-face interactions but also in online spaces, where participants described how empathizing with others' posts or experiences

cultivated a sense of community and support. Empathy, therefore, plays a key role in promoting cooperation, emotional support, and conflict resolution, creating a positive feedback loop that nurtures deeper social bonds.

On the other hand, fear often serves as a barrier in social interactions, especially when individuals are uncertain about the intentions or reactions of others. Fear of judgment, rejection, or negative outcomes can lead to social withdrawal or avoidance of certain interactions. This emotion is particularly relevant in situations involving unfamiliar social contexts or digital spaces, where people may feel vulnerable. One interviewee shared,

"I've noticed that when I interact with people online, I sometimes feel fearful of being misunderstood or criticized. It holds me back from fully expressing myself, even though I want to connect."

Fear of rejection and judgment was also noted in face-to-face settings, particularly in group dynamics where the pressure to conform can trigger anxiety and discomfort. In these cases, fear can undermine authentic social connections, leading individuals to present a more guarded or inauthentic version of themselves. This highlights the dual role of fear: while it can protect individuals from harmful situations, it can also limit the depth and authenticity of social engagement.

Lastly, trust emerges as a foundational emotion in shaping social interactions. Trust is integral to the formation of relationships, as it provides the security necessary for open and honest communication. Without trust, interactions can become tense and superficial, as individuals remain guarded and unwilling to engage fully. Many participants pointed out that trust-building is a slow and deliberate process that requires consistent, positive interactions over time. One interviewee remarked,

"Trust is essential in every relationship. Without it, any interaction feels forced, like there's something missing. But once trust is established, communication flows naturally, and the connection deepens."

In both online and offline settings, the presence of trust allowed individuals to share personal experiences, offer support, and engage in meaningful exchanges. The absence of trust, conversely, led to suspicion and guarded behavior, which limited the scope of social engagement and hindered deeper connections.

How perception and attribution impact social understanding and behavior

Perception and attribution are essential cognitive processes that shape our understanding of social interactions and influence how we behave in social contexts. Perception refers to how we interpret and make sense of the world around us, including the behaviors and intentions of others. Attribution, on the other hand, is the process of explaining the causes of those behaviors, often through internal or external factors. Together, perception and attribution form the lens through which individuals view and respond to social situations. This section explores how these cognitive mechanisms impact social understanding and behavior, drawing insights from the interviews conducted in this study.

Perception plays a crucial role in how we form judgments about others and interpret their actions. The way we perceive someone's behavior can influence our emotional responses and shape our overall impression of them. For instance, individuals who perceive another's actions as friendly or supportive are more likely to respond positively, fostering trust and cooperation. Conversely, if an individual perceives an action as threatening or disrespectful, it may trigger defensive or hostile behaviors. One participant shared,

"When someone smiles at me or greets me warmly, I automatically feel more comfortable and open up to them. But if I sense hostility, even if it's subtle, I tend to withdraw or react defensively."

This illustrates how perception directly influences our emotional responses and behavioral reactions, shaping the course of social interactions.

Moreover, attribution plays a central role in how we understand the behaviors of others. Attribution theory suggests that people tend to attribute behavior to either internal causes (such as personality traits or intentions) or external causes (such as situational factors or circumstances). How we attribute others' actions significantly affects our interactions with them. If someone is late to a meeting, we might attribute it to their lack of punctuality (an internal factor) or to external factors such as traffic or personal issues. This attribution influences whether we feel irritated or empathetic toward them. One participant explained,

"When someone cancels plans last minute, I used to get upset and think they didn't care about me. But after thinking about it, I realized they might have had something urgent come up. Now, I'm more understanding."

This example highlights how changing the attribution of a behavior can alter the emotional and behavioral response, fostering greater understanding and reducing conflict.

The way in which individuals perceive and attribute behavior can also impact the formation and maintenance of relationships. Positive perceptions and favorable attributions generally promote social bonding and cooperation, while negative perceptions and misattributions can strain relationships and lead to misunderstandings. For instance, if we perceive someone as friendly and attribute their actions to their genuine desire to help, we are more likely to engage with them in a collaborative manner. In contrast, if we perceive someone's actions as self-serving and attribute them to manipulative intentions, we may become distrustful and less likely to engage in positive interaction. One participant noted,

"I had a colleague who always seemed distant. I initially thought she was unfriendly, but I later learned she was shy. Once I understood that, I started to interact with her more openly."

This suggests that how we perceive and attribute behaviors can change the dynamics of our relationships, highlighting the importance of cognitive empathy in understanding social behavior.

Finally, perception and attribution can also contribute to broader social dynamics, such as stereotypes, prejudice, and group behavior. When we perceive others through the lens of stereotypes, our attributions are often influenced by these preconceived notions rather than by the individual's actual behavior. This can lead to biased judgments and discriminatory behavior. One interviewee reflected,

"I used to make quick judgments about people based on their background or appearance, but once I became more aware of my biases, I started to question why I attributed certain behaviors to certain groups."

This acknowledgment of bias illustrates how perception and attribution, when influenced by societal stereotypes, can lead to harmful social outcomes, including perpetuating inequality and social division.

The role of cultural norms and social context in shaping the way people connect

Cultural norms and social context are powerful factors that influence how individuals connect with each other. These elements shape not only how we perceive others but also how we behave in social interactions. Cultural norms refer to the shared beliefs, values, and practices within a particular group or society, which dictate appropriate behaviors and expectations in social situations. Meanwhile, social context refers to the environment, circumstances, and specific dynamics in which social interactions take place. Together, cultural norms and social context form the foundation for social behavior, guiding how individuals navigate relationships, communication, and social expectations. This section explores how these factors shape the way people connect, drawing insights from the interviews conducted for this study.

Cultural norms establish the framework for how people are expected to behave in various social settings. These norms dictate the acceptable forms of communication, expressions of emotion, and roles individuals assume in relationships. In some cultures, direct eye contact during conversation is seen as a sign of respect and attentiveness, while in other cultures, it might be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful. This variation in cultural expectations influences the way individuals interpret and engage with one another. One participant shared,

"In my culture, it's considered disrespectful to interrupt someone when they're speaking, so I've learned to be patient and wait for my turn. But I've noticed that in other cultures, people tend to interrupt to express their opinions more quickly."

This insight highlights how cultural norms shape not only the way individuals communicate but also how they interpret the actions of others in different social contexts. When these norms are understood and respected, they facilitate smoother interactions and deeper connections.

Moreover, cultural norms impact the expression of emotions in social interactions. In some cultures, expressing emotions openly is encouraged, while in others, it is more common to suppress emotions in public settings. This can affect how people connect with each other and how they interpret the emotional signals of others. One interviewee reflected,

"In my family, we always express how we feel, whether it's joy or sadness, openly. But when I moved to a different country, I realized that people there were much more reserved. At first, I didn't understand it, but now I realize that it's just part of their cultural norms."

This example illustrates how cultural norms around emotional expression can shape the way individuals connect and understand each other's feelings. When individuals are aware of and sensitive to these differences, they can better navigate cross-cultural interactions and build more empathetic relationships.

In addition to cultural norms, the social context in which an interaction occurs can greatly impact the way individuals connect. Social context refers to the situational factors that influence behavior, such as the environment, power dynamics, and the relationships between individuals. The way people connect in a formal work setting might differ significantly from how they connect in informal social gatherings. One interviewee noted,

"At work, I always keep my conversations professional and avoid personal topics, but with friends, the conversation flows much more freely. The context completely changes how I interact with others."

Social context can also influence the expectations individuals have for social interactions. In some contexts, people may be expected to engage in small talk, while in others, silence might be the norm. Understanding the social context allows individuals to adjust their behavior and meet the expectations of the environment, fostering smoother and more comfortable interactions.

The influence of social context is also evident in group dynamics and the roles individuals assume within different social settings. In some social contexts, people may take on leadership roles, while in others, they may adopt more passive or supportive roles. One participant shared,

"When I'm in a group, I tend to take charge and make decisions, but in a more intimate setting, I prefer to listen and contribute in smaller ways. The context really determines how I interact with others."

This variability in behavior illustrates how individuals adapt their social behaviors depending on the roles they are expected to play within different contexts, which ultimately shapes how they connect with others.

Importance of body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice in conveying meaning

Body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice are crucial nonverbal elements that play a significant role in how meaning is conveyed during social interactions. These forms of communication often carry more weight than spoken words and can either reinforce or contradict what is being said verbally. Understanding the importance of these nonverbal cues can provide insight into the depth and accuracy of human interactions. In this section, we explore how body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice shape communication, drawing from interview results to illustrate their impact on social understanding.

Body language refers to the physical movements and posture of individuals during communication, which can express feelings, intentions, and attitudes without the need for words. crossed arms may indicate defensiveness or resistance, while open gestures and leaning forward might signify attentiveness and openness. One participant shared,

"When I'm talking to someone who is crossing their arms, I automatically feel like they're not interested in the conversation. It feels like they're blocking me off, even if they don't say anything."

This insight underscores how body language can significantly influence our perception of others and the meaning we derive from an interaction. Body language is often subconscious, making it a powerful tool for expressing true feelings or intentions, even when these may not be verbally acknowledged.

Facial expressions, another vital component of nonverbal communication, are universally understood across cultures and serve as an immediate indicator of emotions. The face is highly expressive, with emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and surprise being easily communicated through slight changes in facial muscles. a smile can convey warmth and friendliness, while a furrowed brow can signal confusion or concern. One interviewee stated,

"I can tell when someone is upset even if they try to hide it. Their face gives it away like when their mouth tightens or their eyebrows furrow, it's hard not to notice."

This example highlights how facial expressions are often the first signal of emotional states and can convey meaning before any words are spoken. The ability to read these cues enables individuals to respond with empathy or adjust their behavior according to the emotional climate of a conversation.

Tone of voice is another critical nonverbal cue that conveys meaning in social interactions. The pitch, volume, and intonation of someone's voice can significantly alter the message being communicated. A person may say something seemingly neutral, but the tone can change the perceived intention. A sarcastic tone, can turn a compliment into an insult, while a soft and warm tone can make even the most neutral statement feel kind and considerate. One participant reflected,

"When my boss spoke to me in a calm, gentle tone, it made me feel like he genuinely cared about my input. But when his tone became sharp, I immediately felt like I did something wrong, even though the words weren't that harsh."

This illustrates how tone of voice can carry emotional weight and influence how a message is received, even when the verbal content remains the same.

The combination of body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice in a conversation creates a layered meaning that is essential for effective communication. These nonverbal elements often provide context and clarity to the spoken word, helping to express nuances of intent, emotion, and attitude. If someone says, "I'm fine," but their body language indicates tension and their tone is flat, the listener may perceive that the person is not truly fine, even though the words suggest otherwise. One interviewee noted,

"It's not just the words that matter, it's the whole package the way someone says something and how they carry themselves. I trust the body language and tone more than the words sometimes."

This highlights the importance of nonverbal communication in providing additional layers of meaning, enhancing mutual understanding, and avoiding misunderstandings.

The understanding of cognitive processes like perception and attribution that was performed in this study extends the earlier works in the area of social cognition (Malle, 2022). Then, through a survey, this research expounded that the aspect of social perception is central in dictating how people think about and respond to other people. This finding is also supported by the earlier study on social perception which shows that people use cognitive shortcuts, including the fundamental attribution error in perceiving others. This bears some logic with attribution theory research by Jerotic & Kostic (2024), which posited that people tended to overemphasize the role of personality over situations. The current study complements existing contributions by expanding on these factors by examining cultural norms that underlie these attributions, and extending on the relatively Wohn's lens of attribution research that has largely been nested in Western cultures (Erjavec & Manfreda, 2022).

Other areas of interest in this study included the part played by emotions like empathy, fear and trust in social interaction processes. To date, this research concerns how such emotions were investigated in diverse settings (Li et al., 2021), but here, these feelings were investigated in relation to personal relationships as well as learning how they influence people's responses to verbal and nonverbal stimuli. This conforms to the propositions of Zaki (2020) on the effect of empathy that enhances the promotion of interpersonal relationships. However, this current paper is slightly different as it focuses on these affected emotional responses with the application of digital ones. Prior research has mainly examined interpersonal communication in face-to-face context while more recent work has paid scant attention on how digital communication changes the emotional process (Yuan & Wu, 2020). The current study enriches the existing body of knowledge by showing that whereas various feelings including empathy can be conveyed through a digital medium, they are typically toned down when used online because of the absence of gestures (Ellis & Tucker, 2020).

It was also stressful that body language, facial expressions and the tone of voice were identified by participants as conveying meaning in this study and this was contrasted with previous findings on nonverbal communication by Baird et al. (2021). Interviewees' perceptions of the role of nonverbal signals in interpreting feelings of others correlate with Burgoon, Buller and Woodall (1996)'s theory that intent can be expressed more by nonverbals than verbally. One of the interviewees said, "I believe the body language most than the spoken message" this further supports the assertion made in the literature that nonverbal cues are likely to truthfully

depict the emotional climate (Kremmydas, 2023). To the best of the author's knowledge, the study builds on previous literature by explaining the subtle effects of nonverbal communication in various social relations, especially during the new media usage. According to the study, because of the new form of communication through the internet, the authors noted that there are times that verbal aspects like voice intonation and facial expressions are omitted, which may cause misunderstandings or even less emotional in the context of the virtual environment. To fill this literature gap, one must first reflect on the way that classical media change nonverbal communication patterns and affect social cognition.

Personal background and societal culture define how individuals with non-heterosexual orientation interface and engage, as discussed in this paper. Expanding upon the work of Anglin et al. (2022), the research proposed here highlights the role of culture in shaping one's expected behaviour within social contexts, but takes these concepts further with a consideration of how cultural values impact upon emotional displays, modes of interaction and developing and maintaining relationships in numerous social scenarios. Incorporation of the following statement well demonstrates the effect of culture on non-verbal communication and also assure how people of different culture do have different perceptions of communication than the other. The current study fills a gap by admitting cultural factors into analysis of interpersonal behavior and demonstrating that culture differences in communication may cause misunderstanding or maladjustment in interpersonal transactions particularly in the context of high cultural diversity.

Conclusion

This research work has offered detailed analysis of the psychological aspects of interpersonal relatedness with attention on cognitions, affects, nonverbal behaviors, and culture as moderators. Through examining these elements in both live and mediated interactions, the research responds to major research questions and limitations of the current literature, including perceptions of digital communication on emotions and social relations. The results illustrate that human interaction is not unambiguous and stresses the dynamics of social activity in the context of technological advancement. In conclusion, this work presents noteworthy findings of interest to the practice of social psychology, as it will help disseminate a better understanding of how people interact, communicate and perceive one another as the process unfolds in a world that becomes increasingly global and digital.

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