The Hyperception Model:
What Happens When You Do Not Know Your Significant Other's Friends Offline

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ABSTRACT

The hyperperception model was used to identify the importance of Facebook users knowing their romantic partner's Facebook friends in predicting romantic jealousy. A cross-sectional survey (N = 615) found that surveillance of romantic partners, knowing fewer of the partner's Facebook friends, and frequent interactions between the partner and unknown but not known friends on Facebook were all associated with romantic jealousy, which was in turn associated with a greater intention of leaving one's romantic partner. The data was also consistent with good fit for a path model integrating these bivariate relationships.

KEYWORDS

Facebook, Hyperception Model, Hyperpersonal Model, Romantic Jealousy, Social Network Sites

INTRODUCTION

Before social network sites (SNS), we were largely unaware of our romantic partners' interactions with other people throughout the day. But with SNSs like Facebook we can easily pull up records of exchanges between our romantic partners and his or her friends who also use Facebook. Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais, (2009) observed that seeing one's partner interacting with other people in environments like Facebook can produce feelings of jealousy (i.e., negative emotions associated with the perception that the relationship with one's partner is under threat, Mathes, 1992). A number of studies have found that frequently observing one's partner's Facebook interactions with others is associated with feeling higher rates of jealousy (Dainton & Berkoski, 2013; Dainton & Stokes, 2015). Additional work has shown the same pattern with daily diary research methods (Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, & Lee 2013; Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais 2013). To contribute to this ongoing area of research and to continue exploring the heuristic value of a new model of communication in social media environments, the study reported here examined a different key variable in predicting Facebook jealousy: how well the individuals knows the people they see interact with their partners on Facebook. Focus on this variable will be derived from the newly developed hyperperception model (Spottswood & Carpenter, 2020). The hyperperception model is an expansion of Walther's (1996) original hyperpersonal model into the perceptions of an observing 3rd party.

To develop the hypotheses tested in this study, the original hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) will first be described. Then the extension, the hyperperception model will be discussed. The model describes four key components and the hypotheses tested here will be derived from them.

HYPERPERSONAL MODEL

According to Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model, a relationship between two people interacting in a computer-mediated context may become hyperpersonal or rather "more socially desirable" than people "tend to experience in parallel FtF (face-to-face) interaction" (p. 17). Essentially, senders are able to carefully craft their self-presentations so that they present the most positive version of themselves due to the ability to carefully compose their messages and control or eliminate most nonverbal cues. These abilities are afforded to users via the channel (e.g., ability to edit and reflect a message prior to sending it, ability to write in but also leave out personal characteristics that the sender thinks portrays them in the way they ideally want to be perceived, etc.). Receivers extrapolate from the small amount of positive information they glean that their interaction partner possesses many positive traits. That receiver provides increasingly positive feedback that encourages the particularly positive self-presentation by the sender. This prompts a feedback loop where the sender and receiver both develop especially positive perceptions of each other and their relationship.

The Facebook context does have some dissimilarities to the CMC environments that were used to develop the original model (Walther, 1996). However, on Facebook there is still a constriction of nonverbal cues and people can still craft a positive self-presentation by constructing their public profile and taking advantage of the asynchronous aspects to carefully compose messages (Lee-Wohn, Shim, Joo, & Park, 2014). Additionally, Facebook allows us to remain connected to people we have met offline but due to geographic location changes we no longer see regularly or even contact via other means (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014). In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the contemporary SNS environment is that we are able to observe people we know offline interacting with people we do not know well, or at all, online and/or offline. This was certainly a possibility in the earlier incarnations of the internet that used message boards, but Facebook has exponentially increased the frequency with which we view those we know interacting with those we do not. The hyperperception model suggests that just as two people interacting in a CMC environment can develop a hyperpersonal relationship, someone observing other people's interactions in a computer-mediated environment, especially SNSs, can develop a hyperpersonal perception or "hyperperception" of their relationship. The components of that model are described next and applied to Facebook jealousy phenomena.

THE HYPERPERCEPTION MODEL

The hyperperception model includes four components that parallel the hyperpersonal model's (Walther, 1996) focus on the channel, the sender, the receiver, and feedback loop. However, the model switches focus from the sender and receiver to the observer of an observed sender and an observed receiver (i.e., the dyad) on an SNS, and how the observer develops an impression of the dyad's relationship according to what they see on the SNS. The first component concerns the channel and posits that hyperperception effects are more likely when the observer can easily access records of the dyad's interactions on a channel that makes those interactions accessible, persistent, and makes the observed sender's and observed receiver's profiles associable or linkable to offline personas. In the case of the SNS channel Facebook, people who are Facebook friends with their romantic partners can easily access their partner's persistent interactions with different people that can be associated with offline personas in the form of wall (timeline) posts and comments on those posts. In fact, one of the main motivations for using Facebook is to view or keep tabs on romantic partners', close friends', and family members' activities and interactions on the site (Joinson, 2008).

The observed sender component of the hyperperception model indicates that the observer must be particularly interested in the observed sender's SNS behavior. People in romantic relationships are often motivated to keep an eye on their romantic partner and attempt to prevent anyone else from becoming romantically involved with their partners, a concept known as "mate guarding"

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