

Sleep Calls and Emotional Intimacy in Non-Long-Distance Romantic Relationships: A Qualitative Exploration of Virtual Communication Practices

Timmy Ardian Roring

Science of Psychology Postgraduate Program, Universitas Surabaya,
60292, Surabaya, Indonesia
ardi.roring94@gmail.com

Jefri Setyawan*

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Surabaya, 60292, Surabaya,
Indonesia
jefrisetyawan@staff.ubaya.ac.id

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract

In the context of modern romantic relationships in Indonesia, digital communication has facilitated the maintenance of intimacy and commitment beyond face-to-face interactions. One such practice, sleep calls, has gained prominence even among non-long-distance couples, raising questions about its role in emotional bonding and relationship dynamics. This study investigates how sleep calls function within non-long-distance romantic relationships, focusing on their potential to strengthen intimacy, foster self-disclosure, and provide social support. Through qualitative data from in-depth interviews with two couples, this research examines how sleep calls are perceived and utilized to enhance emotional closeness, while also exploring potential drawbacks, such as the impact on sleep quality. Findings suggest that sleep calls serve as a unique form of virtual intimacy, allowing couples to nurture emotional connections and demonstrate commitment, but also posing challenges to physical well-being. By positioning this study within the broader context of virtual communication in contemporary relationships, we argue that while sleep calls can significantly deepen emotional bonds, their long-term effects on relationship satisfaction and individual health remain an important area for future exploration.

Keywords: *Sleep Calls, Virtual Communication, Emotional Connection, Non-Long-Distance Relationships, Indonesia*

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, dating is not just a social activity but a crucial part of adult life (Delicia & Hasanat, 2022; Santika & Permana, 2021; Indrawati et al., 2018). It plays a crucial role in romantic relationship development, enabling individuals to experience companionship, emotional support, and personal connection. Ellenson (1982) defines dating as a process of interacting with potential partners and forming emotional bonds. Research by Beckmeyer and Cromwell (2019) suggests that being in a relationship enhances life satisfaction and reduces loneliness compared to not being in a relationship. However, navigating these relationships can be challenging, with potential conflicts and dissatisfaction (Gala & Kapadia, 2013). Effective communication is essential for overcoming such challenges and maintaining emotional bonds.

Communication is foundational to romantic relationships, with honesty, openness, and emotional depth being vital to intimacy (DeVito, 2009). Technological advancements have transformed the way couples connect, enabling relationships to thrive beyond face-to-face interactions (Nguyen et al., 2021; Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013). Some argue technology can lead to misunderstandings (Santika & Permana, 2021), but studies also show it fosters intimacy and relationship satisfaction, especially by supporting constant communication even without physical proximity (Caughlin & Sharabi, 2013; Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016).

Recent research indicates that digital communication is central to sustaining and enhancing romantic relationships, extending across the stages of DeVito's (2009) Relationship Development Model. The 'intimacy stage' focuses on profound communication and emotional closeness. In this technological context, sleep calls illustrate how couples cultivate intimacy virtually, maintaining bonds and demonstrating commitment when face-to-face contact isn't possible (Pratamasari & Permadi, 2016; Kurniati, 2015).

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986) highlights intimacy and commitment as core components of romantic love. Intimacy is fostered through both physical and virtual interaction, while commitment involves dedication and investment in the relationship. Sleep calls provide a platform for extended emotional exchanges, reinforcing both intimacy and commitment through sustained communication.

In contemporary Indonesia, platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram are commonly used for virtual communication, with voice and video calls emerging as particularly effective tools for fostering intimacy (Pratiwi & Wijayani, 2023). One such practice is the increasingly common phenomenon of "sleep calls." For this study, "sleep calls" are defined as virtual voice or video calls between romantic partners that extend through

the night until one or both fall asleep. While commonly associated with "long-distance couples" — defined here as couples whose partners are physically separated by substantial geographic distance and cannot easily meet in person — sleep calls are now also practiced by "non-long-distance couples," meaning couples who live in the same city or region without extended physical separation. This shift suggests a shift in how intimacy is maintained across various types of relationships (Pratiwi & Wijayani, 2023; Nurhafifah, 2022).

This study specifically investigates the role of sleep calls in nurturing intimacy and commitment among non-long-distance romantic couples. Rather than focusing on long-distance relationships, this research centers on how non-long-distance couples utilize sleep calls, what significance they attribute to them, and how these interactions influence emotional intimacy.

This research addresses a gap in the literature by closely examining the function of sleep calls in non-long-distance relationships. To achieve this, participants share their personal accounts guided by the central question: "Tell us about your experiences with sleep calls in your romantic relationship, including when and how you first tried them." Secondary questions explore whether sleep calls signal love and emotional connection in these non-long-distance contexts.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how sleep calls influence the dynamics of non-long-distance relationships, with particular emphasis on intimacy, trust, and commitment. Given the rapid digitalization of communication practices, this research offers crucial insights into how virtual interactions, particularly sleep calls, facilitate partners' navigation of the complexities of modern romantic relationships. By examining the relationship between sleep calls and emotional intimacy, this study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between technology, communication, and emotional bonding in contemporary romantic relationships.

2. Method

2.1 Methodology

Given the limited qualitative research on sleep calls within the context of dating, this study employed a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences and interpretations of the participants regarding this phenomenon. Specifically, a descriptive phenomenological approach (Langdridge, 2007) was selected as the most suitable methodology. The aim of this research was to understand how participants perceive and engage with sleep calls in their non-long-distance dating relationships. This approach enabled the authors to gain deep insights into the participants'

subjective experiences, capturing the essence of their personal and emotional engagement with the phenomenon.

2.2 Participants

In line with phenomenological research, purposive sampling techniques were used to recruit participants who met the predetermined criteria, ensuring that the study's focus remained relevant to the research question. The criteria were: (1) the participant is currently in a non-long-distance dating relationship, meaning both partners live in the same city; (2) the participant has engaged in sleep calls with their dating partner. Given the depth of inquiry intended, a small, homogeneous sample size was deemed appropriate to allow for an in-depth exploration of the participants' lived experiences. Two participants were selected based on these criteria: Silvi, 26 years old, and Marcela, 29 years old. Both have been in non-long-distance relationships for 4 and 8 years, respectively. Their experiences were examined in depth to understand how they perceive the role of sleep calls within their romantic relationships.

The use of a small sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, which typically employs a small number of participants to explore complex, individualized experiences. Studies on similar topics, such as Hasanuddin et al. (2025) on Buginese-Makassarese migrants, Daku & Setyawan (2021) on negotiation strategies regarding marriage choices, and Roring & Tondok (2025) on Javanese ethical values in school leadership, have all demonstrated the effectiveness of small samples in achieving detailed insights. These studies demonstrate that, although small sample sizes may seem limited, they are often ideal for obtaining in-depth, meaningful data, especially when exploring niche phenomena or specific social contexts. According to Morse (2000) and Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2015), a smaller sample size is particularly appropriate when the research focuses on a narrower topic and in-depth data collection is required.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed the authors to ask predetermined questions, while also probing further to explore key themes that emerged during the conversation (Gillham, 2005). Each participant underwent two interview sessions, each lasting approximately one hour. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided the flexibility to follow up on interesting points raised by the participants and explore their experiences in more detail. The interview schedule was designed to answer the research question and explore participants' experiences with sleep calls within their romantic relationships. The questions were informed by existing literature on communication and intimacy in relationships (see Santika & Permana, 2021), and aimed to elicit rich, detailed responses. The examples of the

questions asked include: 'How would you describe your feelings when engaging in a sleep call with your partner?' and 'Can you explain the emotional closeness you feel during a sleep call?'. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, following Langdridge's (2007) guidelines for phenomenological research, was used to analyze the interview data. The transcribed interviews were read and re-read to immerse the authors in the data and identify significant findings. Initial notes were made on any exploratory thoughts, reflections, and observations, including attention to non-verbal cues such as tone, pauses, and emphasis. These initial thoughts formed the basis for identifying themes that represented the participants' interpretations and experiences of sleep calls. Through a process of clustering, the themes were categorized into broader themes, which were then reviewed for their interconnections. This thematic approach allowed the authors to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of sleep calls in non-long-distance relationships.

The analysis followed a step-by-step process: (1) thorough reading of the interview transcripts, (2) identification of significant themes, (3) categorization of these themes, and (4) mapping out their interrelations to form a coherent understanding of the phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). The themes were then checked against the original transcripts to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the analysis. Figure 1 below provides an overview of the research method applied in this study.

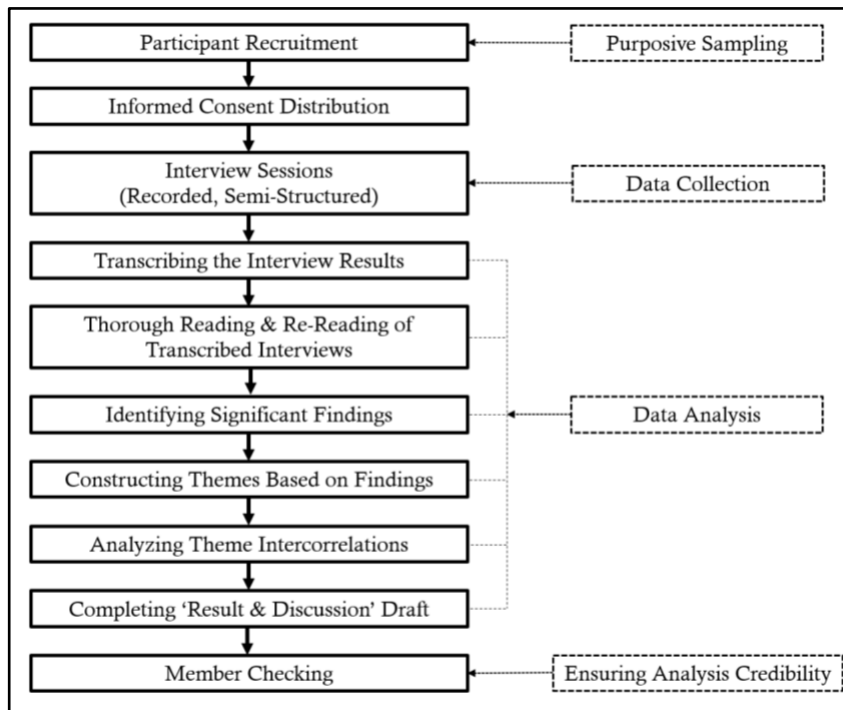


Figure 1. The Summary of Research Method

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines for qualitative research, as formulated by Walker et al. (2005), were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from both participants prior to their involvement in the research. The consent form explained the voluntary nature of their participation, the purpose of the study, and how the data would be used. Participants were assured that their privacy would be respected, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities. The interviews were conducted in locations where participants felt comfortable and their privacy was not compromised. The interview data were only accessible to the authors, ensuring confidentiality.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, member checking was employed (Stahl & King, 2020). After the initial analysis, the authors shared the draft of the 'Results and Discussion' section with the participants for their review. This allowed the participants to provide feedback on the accuracy of the authors' interpretations and confirm that the analysis reflected their lived experiences of sleep calls. Both participants approved the analysis and themes, ensuring that the findings were aligned with their actual experiences.

2.6 Research Quality

To ensure the rigor and validity of the research, the methodology adhered to Yardley's (2017) criteria for qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Sensitivity to context was maintained by thoroughly engaging with the relevant literature and being mindful of the authors' personal biases and assumptions. Commitment and rigor were ensured by following a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting. Transparency and coherence were achieved by clearly outlining the research process, from participant recruitment to data analysis, ensuring consistency between the research question, methodology, and interpretation of the data. The impact and importance of the study were demonstrated by contributing valuable insights into the role of sleep calls in non-long-distance dating relationships, an area that remains underexplored in current literature.

3. Results

3.1. Participants' Profile

Two participants were recruited to help the authors answer the research question and garner insights regarding the sleep-calling phenomenon in non-long-distance couples. The first participant is Silvi (pseudonyms), a 26-year-old female private sector worker who has engaged in a non-long-distance dating relationship with Novan (pseudonyms, male, 27 years of age) for around 4 years. The second participant is Marcela (pseudonym), a 29-year-old female entrepreneur who is engaged in a non-long-distance dating relationship with Aldo (pseudonym, male, 29 years of age). Silvi and Novanereas first met through a mutual friend, whereas Marcela and Aldo met for the first time at the university when they were completing their undergraduate program. Silvi and Marcela reside in the exact same city as their dating partners. Silvi and Novan both live in Sidoarjo, whereas Marcela and Aldo both stay in Surabaya. Hence, due to this close proximity, both participants meet up with their dating partners on a frequent basis. Silvi meets up with Novan two or three times a week, while Marcela meets up with Novan at least once a week. During their regular encounters, they bond through having meals together, going for walks, watching movies, talking, and exchanging stories. Despite the frequent meet-ups, the initial brief interviews done by the authors also revealed that Silvi and Marcela engaged in sleep calls with their partners.

3.2. Results

The participants were interviewed regarding how they engage in and perceive the significance of sleep calls. The interview results were transcribed and analyzed. The analysis then resulted in the following

themes: (1) commitment, honesty, and deeper understanding: sleep calls contributions in non-long-distance dating relationships, (2) self-disclosure constitutes an integral part of the conversations taking place during sleep calls, (3) encouragement, practical guidance, and praise: forms of social support emerging from positive virtual interactions during sleep calls, and (4) the potential decline in sleep quality resulting from sleep calls. The following is a table of themes and categories.

Table 1. Themes dan Categories

Theme	Category	Transcript
Commitment, honesty, and deeper understanding: sleep calls contributions in non-long-distance dating relationships	Sleep calls as a sign of time commitment; honoring dedication.	Original response <i>"Sleep call juga salah satu wujud bahwasannya dia menyediakan waktu untuk aku."</i> (Silvi) Translated response <i>"Engaging in a sleep call is one manifestation of the fact that he is deliberately willing to set aside his time for me."</i> (Silvi)
	Proving honesty through sleep call conversations; building trust and assurance.	Original response <i>"itu [sleep call] kan salah satu cara untuk bisa membangun kepercayaan, jadi dia benar-bener tahu nih, bener-bener yakin bahwasannya aku izin mau tidur memang bener-bener tidur, bukan keluar, bukan di club, atau bukan [melakukan] yang lain-lain gitu."</i> (Silvi) Translated response <i>"Sleep calls are one way to foster trust. It allows my partner to know and be sure that when I say I am going to sleep, I am actually going to sleep – not going out, clubbing, or doing something else."</i> (Silvi)
	Deep talks in sleep calls fostering better understanding; revealing authentic traits.	Original response <i>"Setelah menjalin hubungan dalam hitungan satu, dua, tiga tahun atau lebih, kamu kan semakin bisa melihat pasanganmu itu seperti apa sebenarnya. Seiring hubungan</i>

Theme	Category	Transcript
		<p><i>makin jauh, itu lama-lama kan makin terlihat, dan melalui deep talk kamu bisa tahu lebih banyak tentang pasangamu. Selama sleep calls, obrolan seperti itu kan umumnya terjadi ya. Jadi memang pembicaraan-pembicaraan yang apa adanya dan cukup dalam.”</i> (Marcela)</p> <p>Translated response</p> <p><i>“... after being together for one, two, three years, or even more, you start to see what your partner is really like. As the relationship progresses, that becomes even clearer, and through deep talks, you can unlock many things about your partner. By engaging in sleep calls, these sorts of conversations, which are authentic and deep, surely can take place.”</i> (Marcela)</p>
Self-disclosure constitutes an integral part of the conversations taking place during sleep calls	Bi-directional acts of self-disclosure	<p>Original response</p> <p><i>“Ehm ya kadang curhat, kadang dapet curhatan juga.”</i> (Marcela)</p> <p>Translated response</p> <p><i>“Ehm.. at times, I engage in emotional disclosure; at other times, I listen to his.”</i> (Marcela)</p>
	Various depths of self-disclosure; ranging from casual to emotional level	<p>Original response</p> <p><i>“Di awal-awal percakapan [saat sleep call], kami tanya-tanya aktivitasnya baru-baru ini ngapain aja. Kalau memang pas lagi ada masalah, kami lanjut ngobrol lagi ada problem apa dan bareng-bareng coba nemu solusinya.”</i> (Silvi)</p> <p>Translated response</p> <p><i>“Our initial exchanges [during sleep calls] typically centers on sharing details about our recent activities, what we have been up to lately. If</i></p>

Theme	Category	Transcript
		<i>any, we then talk about problems we encounter in our own lives and collaboratively try to formulate the best possible solutions.” (Silvi)</i>
Encouragement, practical guidance, and praise: forms of social support emerging from positive virtual interactions during sleep calls	Empowering encouragement	<p>Original response <i>“[pada percakapan dalam sleep call] Kami tuh berusaha untuk memberikan semangat buat satu sama lain. [Narasi semangat] yang paling saya ingat itu adalah ‘tetap lakukan yang terbaik, jangan menjadi wanita yang lemah apapun yang terjadi’.” (Silvi)</i></p> <p>Translated response <i>“[In conversations during sleep calls] We strive to offer encouragement to one another. One [An encouragement from partner] that I remember most until now is ‘just continue to do your best; do not allow yourself to become a weak woman regardless of what you are facing’.” (Silvi)</i></p>
	Practical guidance to tackle problems	<p>Original response <i>“Pas waktu-waktu bingung seperti itu, aku biasanya cerita ke dia [pasangan]. Kami terus obrolkan, pikirkan situasinya, dan bener-bener bahas biasanya cukup lama [saat bercakap-cakap via sleep call]. Akhirnya, dari obrolan semacam ini, aku dapat jalan keluar. Seringnya itu di akhir dia bilang ‘Mungkin sebaiknya seperti ini deh bla bla bla’.” (Marcela)</i></p> <p>Translated response <i>“In those moments of uncertainty, I usually turn to my partner. We talk things through, reflect on the situations, and engage in thoughtful discussion at length [while</i></p>

Theme	Category	Transcript
		<p><i>conversing during sleep calls]. Eventually, these sorts of conversations lead me to a practical solution. Often, it ends with him gently guiding me, saying something like, 'Perhaps it's best if you approach it this way instead.'</i>" (Marcela)</p>
	Praises that nourish one's self-esteem	<p>Original response <i>"Waktu aku sudah berusaha untuk mencapai sesuatu, meskipun belum sukses atau ada progress yang berarti, dia [pasangan] sering kasih pujian tulus... Dengar pujian seperti itu benar-bener membuat lega dan menguatkan ya. Mengingatku aku juga untuk berhenti bentar dan sadar bahwa aku ini layak dan mampu..."</i> (Silvi)</p> <p>Translated response <i>"When I have put effort into chasing my goals, even if I haven't succeeded or made significant progress yet, my partner often offers heartfelt praise... Hearing this kind of praise feels deeply affirming and empowering. It reminds me to pause and recognize my own worth and capability..."</i> (Silvi)</p>
The potential decline in sleep quality resulting from sleep calls	Unexpected sleep disturbances	<p>Original response <i>"Yang sering dirasakan ya lebih ke gampang kebangun karena denger suara entah mic-nya terlalu sensitif atau gimana, jadi suara kecil kedengeran, kek gitu jadinya kebangun."</i> (Marcela)</p> <p>Translated response <i>"What I often experienced is a tendency to wake up easily due to hearing sounds—possibly because the microphone is too sensitive—so</i></p>

Theme	Category	Transcript
		<i>even faint noises become audible and cause awakening."</i> (Marcela)
	Daytime dysfunction caused by inadequate sleep	<p>Original response</p> <p><i>"Akhirnya waktunya orang pada bangun, malah baru tidur [karena sleep call]. Jadi tidur cuma bentar dan siangnya pusing. Aktivitas mau tidak mau terganggu dikit."</i> (Silvi)</p> <p>Translated response</p> <p><i>"Sleep was delayed until morning hours, coinciding with the time others began their day [due to a sleep call]. As a result, I only slept briefly and experienced dizziness during the day, which inevitably disrupted my activities to some extent."</i> (Silvi)</p>

3.2.1 Commitment, Honesty, and Deeper Understanding: Sleep Calls Contributions in Non-Long-Distance Dating Relationships

Despite their frequent face-to-face meetings, participants also maintain intensive online communication with their dating partners. They admit that virtual interactions occurring through online platforms are a manifestation of their commitment to each other and to their relationship. From participants' perspective, this 'commitment' is interpreted as the willingness and dedication to allocate time for one another amidst their own hectic schedules. One way to actualize this commitment is by engaging in sleep calls. A substantial amount of time is indeed devoted to sleep calls, as illustrated by Silvi, *"Beginning at approximately 8:30 to 9:00 PM, we sometimes engage in a long-lasting phone or video call that persists through the night even into early morning hours, [the call] often remaining active despite the fact that he and I have fallen asleep."*

Participants also perceive sleep calls as a means to prove their honesty. Through the video calls that facilitate sleep calls to occur, participants and their partners can assess the congruence between what they say to each other and the observable reality. Such consistency is instrumental in enhancing participants' trust toward their partners. Regarding this, Silvi firmly stated, *"Sleep calls are one way to foster trust. It allows my partner to know and be sure that when I say I am going to sleep, I am actually going to sleep – not going out, clubbing, or doing something else."*

Additionally, it is worth noting that both participants are determined to advance their relationship to the stage of marriage. In line with that

intention, they are on agreement that comprehensive understanding of their partners is of paramount importance. Thus, sleep calls serve as a way for them to develop a deeper understanding of their partners. This is possible because, according to the participants, deep talks take place in the conversations during voice/video calls eventually leading to sleep calls. This kind of interaction is characterized by a high level of depth and intimacy, providing chances for participants and their partners to reveal things about themselves that were previously hidden, unseen, or unidentified.

“Sleep calls can give us chances to have deep talks with our partners. You know after being together for one, two, three years, or even more, you start to see what your partner is really like. As the relationship progresses, that becomes even clearer, and through deep talks, you can unlock many things about your partner. By engaging in sleep calls, these sorts of conversations, which are authentic and deep, surely can take place.” (Marcela)

On the whole, virtual interactions through sleep calls hold the potential to enable and empower non-long-distance dating couples to prove their commitment, affirm their honesty, and get to know each other more intimately.

3.2.2 Self-Disclosure Constitutes an Integral Part of the Conversations Taking Place during Sleep Calls

Sleep calls involve conversations through which participants voluntarily share personal information about themselves, speak up about their experience, and articulate their thoughts or feelings to their partners. What is being talked about during conversations leading to sleep calls range from trivial topics, such as daily activities or latest interests, to personal, complex, intimate, and substantial ones, such as emotional experiences. This form of communication is commonly referred to as self-disclosure.

“Our initial exchanges [during sleep calls] typically centers on sharing details about our recent activities, what we have been up to lately. If any, we then talk about problems we encounter in our own lives and collaboratively try to formulate the best possible solutions.” (Silvi)

As described above, acts of self-disclosure during sleep calls are often started with seemingly peripheral topics, focusing on things like recent exciting and memorable experiences, new hobbies participants just started to engage in, or interesting stuff found on social media. An act of self-disclosure then proceeds with more substantial, meaningful and in-depth

discussions, revolving around experiences which have triggered sadness, anger, or stress and how the participants have been dealing with these negative emotions.

Discussing deep and profound personal topics that encompass their feeling is perceived by the participants as an act of emotional disclosure or sharing personal sentiments known as *curhat*, which literally means expressing or disclosing one's emotional experience openly and honestly. During *curhat*, as told by the participants, emotional disclosure often involves the emergence of personal narratives characterized by intimacy and profound emotional resonance.

Participants strongly highlight that the act of *curhat* is not exclusively for them. Their partners also have turns to disclose their emotional experiences. In other words, *curhat* is bidirectional, with both the participants and their partners alternately engaging in it, allowing them to become patient and attentive listeners for one another.

“There are times [during sleep calls] when I open up emotionally, and at other times, I’m the one listening to my partner’s emotional disclosure. When something’s bothering me, I will let it out. Likewise, I also share the positive feelings when I’m in a really good mood. My partner equally has the opportunity to do the same.” (Silvi)

Furthermore, as derived from the testimonies provided by the participants, acts of self-disclosure function not merely as means of sharing personal experiences, but also as a crucial mechanism for coping with stress and anxiety. Thus, the findings of this study highlight that mutual listening and emotional support play a pivotal role in the establishment of a secure and comforting basis within a romantic relationship, where both partners feel valued and understood. This, in the long run, ultimately reinforce intimacy and strengthen mutual trust, both of which are cornerstones of enduring, meaningful relationships.

In summary, acts of self-disclosure done in turn by the participants and their partners serve as a catalyst for deep talks that forge the emotional bond between participants and their partners. By mutual sharing of emotional experiences and the act of attentive listening, they not only cultivate intimacy but also alleviate mental or psychological burden they may be dealing with. Thus, open and supportive acts of self-disclosure are likely to help romantic partners better understand one another, cultivate a stronger, more meaningful relationship, as well as improve mental health, and sleep calls can facilitate these impactful acts of self-disclosure to take place.

3.2.3 Encouragement, Practical Guidance, and Praise: Forms of Social Support Emerging from Positive Virtual Interactions during Sleep Calls

For participants, it turns out that engaging in bidirectional acts of self-disclosure during sleep calls provide a significant additional benefit coming in the form of social supports they received from their dating partners. One of these social support manifestations is encouragement, often emerging as a response to participants' emotional disclosure (*curhat*). In this context, participants receive empowerments from their partners in the form of constructive and motivating verbal advice which eventually serves as a source of strength and aspirations for them.

Silvi, for instance, shared a valuable experience in relation to receiving a kind of social support from her partner while they were speaking during sleep calls. When they were having that particular conversation, after Silvi spoke up about the emotional strain she was facing, her dating partner gave her a meaningful encouragement. He reminded Silvi the importance of persistent efforts to give her best in everything she does. He also motivated her not to dwell on her weaknesses or disadvantages. Her partner's encouragement was not merely a collection of words or a pointless utterance, but rather a resonant, guiding mantra that has continuously and strongly enchoed in her mind even up to this day, providing a long-lasting source of motivation and inspiration in navigating life's challenges.

Not only do participants receive advice which is empowering in nature, when they talk about the problems they are facing while conversing through sleep calls, their partners also provide them with solutions in the forms of practical steps, guidance, or considerations. These kinds of instrumental supports are valuable in helping participants deal with the hurdles they encounter. Marcela highlighted that when facing difficulties, others may undermine the problems she tries to solve; however, as the one who must deal with those challenges, the situations can be so sophisticated and draining, both physically and emotionally. Hence, as she firmly stated, she sometimes needs to be supported, and that support can come from her partner's pivotal practical opinions she acknowledges through conversations during sleep calls. She depicted how that works as shown below:

"Like anyone else, I inevitably face a variety of problems in my life. Some may seem simple; while others far more complex – though, in reality, such distinctions are highly subjective, right? Despite that, from my own standpoint, addressing these problems can be very overwhelming, and I often struggle to determine the most effective way to deal with them or how to move forward. In those moments of uncertainty, I usually turn to my partner. We talk things through, reflect on the situations, and engage in

thoughtful discussion at length [while conversing during sleep calls]. Eventually, these sorts of conversations lead me to a practical solution. Often, it ends with him gently guiding me, saying something like, 'Perhaps it's best if you approach it this way instead.' (Marcela)

In addition to motivation and practical solutions, words of praise are also commonly genuinely expressed, becoming another form of social support naturally emerging during sleep calls. Praise can be emboldening in nature, enabling participants to reaffirm their qualities and reminding them how precious their existence is. Praise, seemingly trivial at first glance, often carries unexpectedly substantial impacts, one of which is bolstering participants' esteem, as illustrated by Silvi in the following statement:

"When I have put effort into chasing my goals, even if I haven't succeeded or made significant progress yet, my partner often offers heartfelt praise like, 'That's already impressive. Having a tangible plan and the bravery to pursue it means you're already moving forward. You're amazing. You're remarkable for having had the courage to begin'. Hearing this kind of praise feels deeply affirming and empowering. It reminds me to pause and recognize my own worth and capability, making me realize, 'Well, I actually have been doing well. I am valuable enough and I should be proud of myself.'" (Silvi)

In sum, open and honest conversations during sleep calls often lead to participants getting precious social support in the form of encouragement, actionable advice, and affirmations that enhance their esteem and remind them of their inherent value.

3.2.4 The Potential Decline in Sleep Quality Resulting from Sleep Calls

Although sleep calls can offer several benefits, especially in the context of relationship strengthening, this communication practice inevitably entails risks that cannot be overlooked, particularly concerning sleep quality. Referring to participants' shared experiences, sleep calls ever caused disturbance and negatively impacted their sleep patterns.

It is important to note that one characteristics of sleep calls is that the line often stays connected even after couples involved in the practice have fallen asleep. This also happens in the participants' context. Marcela reported that despite of the fact that she and her partner have fallen asleep, the call remains connected and active. It turns out that this continuously active call frequently disrupted the tranquility of her sleep. She explained that the sounds transmitted and heard through the active connection may

cause significance disturbances, triggering her to wake up earlier than intended.

Silvi also used to experience a rather drastic change in her sleep routine due to sleep calls. She admitted that not so long ago, every time she had conversations with her dating partner through sleep calls, she was only able to fall asleep when dawn approaches. Consequently, Silvi woke up late and had to deal with consequences resulting from a lack of quality rest. Furthermore, when she rested inadequately, she normally suffered from a prolonged headache, blocking her to function optimally throughout the day.

Despite the obvious potential troubled caused by sleep calls, participants insisted that they are currently capable of demonstrating an adequate capacity for self-regulation. This ability, they claimed, has become a key factor in preventing the negative impacts of sleep calls from escalating into more serious and chronic issues. At least, by being aware of potential consequences, the participants have started to take deliberate steps to manage the weekly frequency allocated for sleep calls in order to preserve their sleep quality.

Overall, participants' real-life experiences clearly highlight the potential downsides of sleep calls that can harm one's sleep quality. Thus, engaging in sleep calls as a habit must be balanced with proper self-regulation for the sake of getting maximum benefits of sleeps which are definitely needed. The following figure 2 presents a summary of participants' experiences in engaging in sleep calls, contextualized within the aforementioned themes.

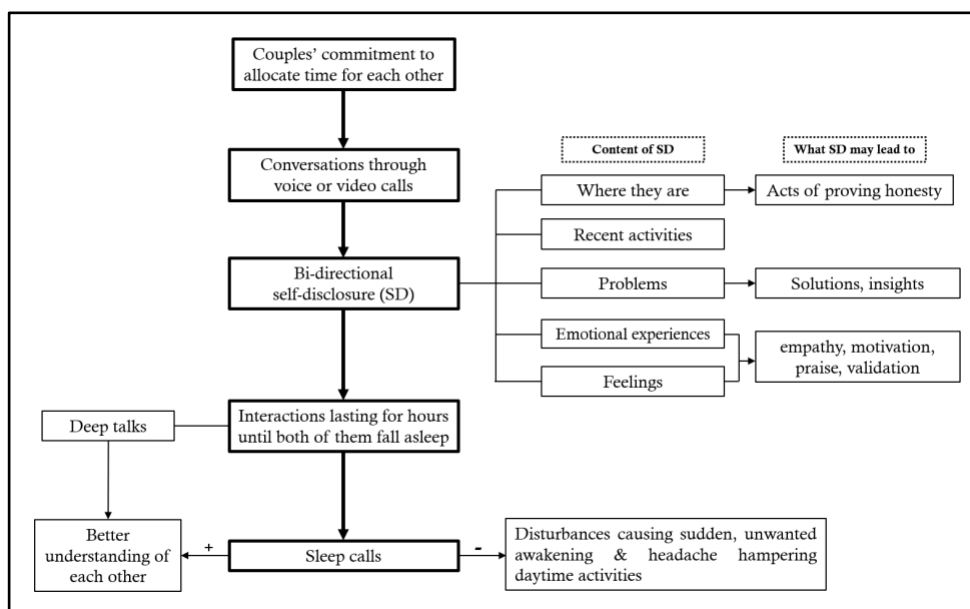


Figure 2. Participants' Lived Experiences with Sleep Calls

The flowchart illustrates the function of sleep calls within non-long-distance romantic relationships. The process begins when partners allocate time for each other, which facilitates mutual self-disclosure (SD) through voice or video calls. Extended conversations promote emotional closeness and honesty, resulting in substantive discussions that enhance mutual understanding. Self-disclosure topics, including personal emotions and vulnerabilities, promote empathy, encouragement, and validation. However, the extended duration of sleep calls may disrupt sleep, leading to frequent awakenings and headaches that can impair daytime functioning. Sleep calls strengthen emotional bonds but may negatively affect physical health.

4. Discussion

This study systematically explores the experience of sleep calls in non-long-distance romantic relationships. According to DeVito's Six-Stage Relationship Development Model (2009), the findings suggest that couples in these relationships have progressed to the intimacy stage, characterized by ongoing, personal, and substantive communication. Participants interpret this communication as evidence of mutual commitment. In romantic relationships, commitment is defined by the specific agreements and preferences couples establish to express their dedication (DeVito, 2009). Participants identified sleep calls as an essential mechanism for

demonstrating commitment, serving both to maintain connection and to facilitate emotionally meaningful virtual interactions. Consequently, sleep calls support the intimacy stage of relationships in the digital era by enabling partners to express emotional investment through sustained online communication.

Sternberg (1986) emphasizes that commitment is shown through concrete actions that reflect mutual devotion, such as allocating time to one another despite hectic schedules. Sleep calls, as noted by participants, serve as a contemporary approach to expressing commitment, enabling couples to demonstrate their willingness to invest time in meaningful interactions through digital platforms. This allocation of time is crucial in fostering intimacy, as it helps maintain a consistent and emotional connection, even when physical proximity is unavailable. In line with Sternberg's (1986) view, commitment is closely tied to intimacy, which can also be cultivated virtually, as evidenced by the concept of online intimacy (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016). Through extended and often late-night conversations, couples deepen their emotional bonds, aligning with previous research that suggests extended time together is associated with higher relationship satisfaction. The more couples devote considerable amount of time together, the more likely they are to experience a higher level of perceived fulfillment or satisfaction with their romantic relationships (Murray et al., 1996).

Moreover, the devotion reflected in sleep calls also helps reinforce the emotional security of the relationship. Stanley et al. (2010) argue that couples who dedicate significant time to each other are more likely to experience a stronger sense of emotional security and relational stability, which is essential for long-term relationships. The consistent engagement in sleep calls, therefore, is not only a testament to commitment but also to an ongoing investment in emotional well-being, serving as a foundation for relational stability. This further supports the notion that sleep calls are a modern manifestation of emotional commitment, reinforcing both intimacy and trust.

Trust, which plays a pivotal role in sustaining strong and healthy romantic relationships (Vivekananda & Meenakshi, 2024), is deeply intertwined with sleep calls. Participants in this study noted that engaging in sleep calls allowed them to demonstrate honesty and transparency, crucial elements in fostering trust. By enabling couples to maintain open, visible communication even when they are physically distant, sleep calls act as a tool for building and maintaining trust, which is vital for long-term relational satisfaction. Building on Sternberg's (1986) model, Tobore (2020) argues that trust is shaped through honesty and three critical elements: emotional closeness, self-disclosure, and shared positive

experiences. The findings from this study support this framework, as sleep calls foster self-disclosure and emotional closeness, which further nurture trust between partners.

The act of self-disclosure or the sharing of personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, is central to the development of intimacy (DeVito, 2009). During sleep calls, participants engage in self-disclosure, which begins with peripheral topics such as recent activities and interests, but progresses to more in-depth emotional conversations about stress, sadness, or personal challenges. This progression of self-disclosure mirrors the stages outlined by Liang et al. (2022), where couples transition from discussing trivial matters to sharing profound emotional experiences. As discussed by Carpenter & Greene (2015), self-disclosure plays a critical role in relationship development, enhancing emotional intimacy by fostering a sense of being valued and understood. This reciprocal exchange of personal emotions and experiences contributes to relationship satisfaction and is a vital process for cultivating deeper bonds between partners.

Furthermore, self-disclosure during sleep calls enables couples to offer emotional support, as one partner shares their struggles and the other listens attentively, providing empathy and understanding. The act of listening is a form of emotional support that enhances the emotional security of the relationship (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016). When one partner shares positive emotions or accomplishments, the other may provide esteem support, reaffirming their value and reinforcing positive self-perceptions (Drageset, 2021). Emotional disclosure or *curhat* during sleep calls allows individuals to receive attentive listening from their romantic partners, fostering a sense of care during periods of emotional distress. Couples may also exchange humor and encouragement, which function as forms of emotional support. When individuals encounter difficulties, sharing these challenges with their partners can result in practical advice, representing informational support. Motivation and praise provided by partners help maintain positive self-perceptions, thereby fulfilling the role of esteem support. These forms of social support—emotional, informational, and esteem—are crucial for maintaining a resilient and stable relationship, helping couples cope with stress and navigate challenges together (Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2000). Hatala (2011) similarly identifies social support as one of four pillars of resilience, enabling positive adaptation and emotional hardiness during adversity.

Despite its possible advantages, when analyzed from a different perspective, there are potential risks of sleep calls that should not be overlooked, especially related to relational interactions. First, the conversations during sleep calls might not represent the authentic

personality of individuals that in the long-run causing misunderstanding or unrealistic expectations regarding the relationship. Furthermore, excessive reliance on online communication may diminish the quality of face-to-face interactions. Additionally, disproportionate self-disclosure poses a risk of increased emotional vulnerability (e.g., Derlega et al., 2008), potentially hindering intimacy and instead producing counterproductive effects for the relationships. There is also a drawback potential, particularly relating to the declining sleep quality, which was ever experienced by the participants in this study.

A huge body of research has shown the significance of sleep for human beings. Apart from overall wellness, adequate and high quality of sleep can assist in energy conservation, allowing people to function optimally during the day (Miletínová & Bušková, 2021). In contrast, compromised sleep quality results in the decrease of cognitive functioning, dampening memory processing and other brain functions (Assefa et al., 2015). Terrible sleep quality also generates risks of declining physical health, starting from a higher risk of health problems, lower immunity, to impaired metabolic function (Barone & Krieger, 2015). In line with the premise that maintaining sleep quality is of paramount importance, Buysse et al. (1989) developed Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), a renowned and the most frequently used tool to assess people's sleep quality due to its proven validity and reliability in evaluating one's quality of sleep (Fabbri et al., 2021). These disruptions highlight the importance of striking a balance between virtual intimacy and maintaining healthy sleep routines.

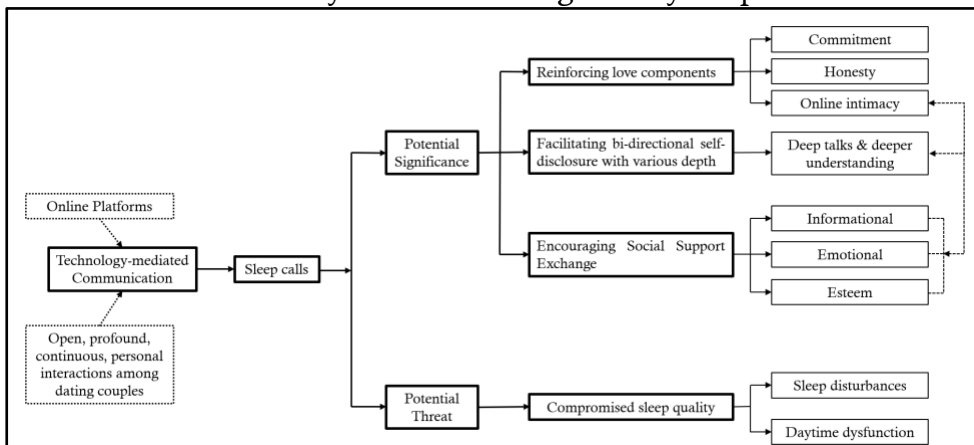


Figure 3. The Dynamics of Sleep Calls within Non-Long-Distance Dating Relationship.

The flowchart (Figure 3) illustrates how sleep calls via technology-mediated communication reinforce commitment, honesty, and online intimacy by enabling deep, bi-directional self-disclosure. These

interactions foster emotional intimacy and encourage social support exchange (informational, emotional, and esteem). However, they also pose a potential threat by compromising sleep quality, which can lead to sleep disturbances and daytime dysfunction. Sleep calls strengthen emotional bonds but can have a negative impact on physical well-being.

The table 2 below presents an integrated view of participants' lived experiences with sleep calls in non-long-distance dating context alongside researchers' analytical interpretations grounded in previous research findings. The table provides a detailed analysis of couples' experiences with sleep calls in non-long-distance romantic relationships, addressing both positive and negative outcomes. Sleep calls reinforce relationship components such as commitment, honesty, and online intimacy.

Table 2. The Overview of the Research Key Findings

Phenomenon	Potential Impact	Main Findings (Theme)	Specific Findings	Details		Reference
Sleep Calls	Significance	Reinforcing love components	Commitment	Manifestation of couples willingness to devote time for each other		Sternberg (1986); Ryff & Singer (2000); Carpenter & Greene (2015); Tobore (2020)
			Honesty	An effort to maintain trust and show loyalty		
			Online Intimacy	Leading to deep talks resulting in better understanding of each other		
			Bi-directional			
		Facilitating acts disclosure	Various depths	Peripheral	Current location, recent activities, recent interests	Liang et al. (2022)
				Intermedia te	Opinions, insights	
				Emotional	Feelings, emotional experiences	
		Encouraging social support exchange	Various types of support	Informational	Practical solution, guidance	Lomanowska & Guitton (2016); Drageset (2021)
		Emotional	Empathy, motivation			
			Esteem	Praise, validation		

Phenomenon	Potential Impact	Main Findings (Theme)	Specific Findings	Details	Reference
	Disadvantages	Triggering quality	Sleep disturbances	Noises causing sudden, unwanted awakening	Buysse et al. (1989)
			Daytime dysfunction	Mainly due to the headaches experienced due to lack of sleep	

Couples demonstrate dedication by allocating time for each other and fostering trust and transparency through reciprocal self-disclosure, which deepens emotional bonds. These interactions promote emotional intimacy as partners share a range of feelings and experiences, strengthening their connection. Sleep calls also facilitate the exchange of social support, including informational, emotional, and esteem support, which collectively enhance relationship satisfaction and individual well-being. However, sleep calls may negatively affect sleep quality, leading to disturbances and daytime dysfunction that can impair daily productivity. This analysis suggests that while sleep fosters emotional intimacy and commitment, it may also compromise physical health, highlighting the importance of a balanced approach to virtual communication in romantic relationships.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the phenomenon of sleep calls in non-long-distance dating relationships, focusing on how couples engage in and perceive the significance of this form of virtual communication. We found that sleep calls not only serve as a means for partners to demonstrate commitment and honesty but also deepen their understanding of one another, facilitating meaningful self-disclosure that contributes to emotional support and intimacy. However, despite these positive outcomes, sleep calls also present potential risks, particularly concerning sleep quality. The findings suggest that while sleep calls can foster closeness and relational satisfaction, they can also disrupt sleep patterns, resulting in negative consequences for both physical and mental well-being.

Understanding the role of sleep calls in non-long-distance relationships necessitates a broader examination of the dynamics within modern romantic relationships, particularly in the digital age. Our research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on virtual communication in relationships, highlighting how technology can bridge gaps and enhance

intimacy, while also introducing complexities, such as declines in sleep quality. The novel contribution of this study lies in its exploration of the dual nature of sleep calls, emphasizing both their positive role in enhancing intimacy and their potential to negatively impact well-being, which has not been fully explored in existing literature.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, it suggests that romantic relationships, particularly those facilitated by technology, should be considered in the context of balance—nurturing intimacy and connection while being mindful of the potential negative impact on sleep and overall well-being. This balance is critical in optimizing both emotional closeness and physical health. Second, future research should investigate the long-term effects of sleep deprivation, considering both the emotional benefits and the risks associated with disrupted sleep. Future studies could specifically explore the impact of prolonged sleep deprivation on relationship satisfaction and mental health, with a focus on how different communication practices influence couples' well-being over time. A deeper understanding of these dynamics could offer valuable insights into how modern communication practices shape the quality and sustainability of romantic relationships.

In conclusion, while sleep calls play a significant role in fostering commitment and intimacy in non-long-distance relationships, they also pose challenges that must be addressed. By balancing the emotional benefits of virtual communication with efforts to maintain sleep quality, couples may maximize the positive aspects of this practice. However, as the sample size of this study was limited, further research with a more diverse and larger sample is needed to confirm these findings and provide a broader understanding of how sleep calls influence relationship dynamics in different cultural and relational contexts. Further research is needed to identify effective mitigation strategies and to assess the long-term effects of sleep calls on relationship satisfaction and individual well-being. Ongoing scholarly inquiry is essential to fully understand the impact of virtual communication practices on relationship dynamics.

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