Thesis On Long Distance Relationships
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Abstract

This research was primarily focused on the various aspects of long distance relationships in Bangladesh, such as the reasons behind such a relationship, whether they are thought to be sustainable and the problems that may arise in a long distance relationship and society’s point of view on them. I set my sights on proving that the numbers of long distance relationships have increased in Bangladesh. I also assumed that various reasons are responsible for people to be in long distance relationships and that most people believe such relationships can be durable in the long-run. But I also supposed that various problems can cause such a relationship to end and that society, especially parents and elders, react negatively to it and discourage someone from being in such a relationship. After a primary research was carried out, along with a secondary one to further strengthen my claim, I was able to prove my hypothesis partially right, even though my research do contain its fair share of limitations.
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Introduction

“Distance makes the heart grow fonder”
- Thomas Haynes Boyly

A long distance relationship, as the name implies, is a romantic relationship between two partners that stretches over two substantially geographic locations. The precise distance that defines a long distance relationship is not theoretically fixed, with various researchers arguing on various distances. For instance, Guldner (2004) used the statement, “my partner lives far enough away from me that it would be very difficult or impossible to see him or her everyday”, to define a long distance relationship.

Even though Guldner’s definition of a long distance relationship stands correct to some extent, it is still vague. For instance, couple may not be able to see each other every day even if they live in the same city, but in completely opposite directions. They may have work or other commitments which will not make it possible for them to meet every day. But such a relationship cannot be termed long distance. After all, the distance between them is not substantial. Therefore, it can be argued that long distance relationships can only take place between couples who are separated by a few hundreds or thousands of miles.

There could be various reasons for a long distance relationship. Sometimes, an individual’s work may require them to relocate and hence move to another place. Education may also require people to move. But one of the major reasons for long distance relationships is online dating. The Internet has sure made a lot of things can be possible, and internet or online relationships are one of them. A person can meet various people from different places via online dating websites and sometimes, this may develop into something more serious, leading to a long distance relationship.
Bangladesh has been blessed with the fast advent of the latest technologies in recent years, meaning that people can keep in touch with their loved ones even over long distances. Plus, more people can get access to the internet nowadays due to the fact that it has become cheaper and easier to access over the years, leading to increasing number of people taking part in virtual online chat rooms. I worked on finding out whether these factors are leading to increasing number of long distance relationships in Bangladesh and also what might be the reasons behind an individual’s choice to engage in a long distance relationship and whether they think such a relationship can be sustainable or not. I also wondered whether society views long distance relationship in an acceptable way or not. Answers to these questions were discussed in this thesis.
A relationship that spans the opposite coasts of a country with the size of the United States of America maybe long distance, given the large area of the country. But the same cannot be said for Bangladesh. For a country that is smaller than even the state of California in the United States, it is logical to term any intra-country relationship as long distance. Keeping in touch with a loved one who lives in a different city is extremely easy given the low call rates for telephones and the prospect of seeing the partner frequently is possible too, since transportation costs are low and the highest a journey by air can take is a single hour. Therefore, even though I do agree with Guldner (2004)’s definition of a long distance relationship, I feel that it should be furthermore be classified that such a relationship takes place over two different countries when we talk in Bangladesh’s context, which would indeed make it difficult for partners to see each other once a year, let alone every day.

Long distance relationships are becoming increasingly common in Bangladesh nowadays, especially among the young, tech-savvy population, due to the ease of communicating over the internet in ways which are also very cost effective. The availability of cheap smart phones that allow these features has also made it easier to minimize the “distance between the hearts” (Narayan, 2005) of a long distance couple. But in the first place, one might ask: why do long distance relationships exist in the first place? There may be various reasons behind a long distance relationship, the most common ones being a partner being away abroad for education or work obligations. But whether these relationships can last or not is questionable, because issues such as the strains of being away and mistrust can have a big influence in breaking up such an affair.
Lastly, the conservative society of our country possibly has greater reservations towards a long distance relationship than they have towards a normal relationship because they think it is better for their children to be with someone that their parents choose and especially not with someone who they think may not be worth trusting due to the distance that is or was between the couple.
Research Questions

In my research I plan to find the aspects of long distance relationships. My research will address the following questions:

- What is long distance relationship?
- What are some reasons behind long distance relationships?
- Does long distance relationships last?
- How many factors can end such a relationship?
- How society reacts in a long distance relationship?
Hypothesis

From my research, I expect to find that the number of long distance relationships has been increasing in Bangladesh over the last few years. I assume that various reasons are responsible for people to be in long distance relationships and that most respondents will agree that long distance relationships can indeed come to fruition in the future, even though I also imagine that various problems arise in a long distance relationship and that they can pose a legitimate threat to the relationship. I also suppose that society reacts negatively to long distance relationships and that they advise against getting involved in a long distance relationship.
Methodology

To complete this work of research, I set out to gather data, from both primary and secondary sources, and tried my best to make sure that these data were reliable to the greatest degree.

To gather primary data, I conducted a survey of a representative sampling of the general public in Dhaka and interviewed those who are having, or have had, long distance relationships. I also took into account the responses I got from people who never had long distance relationships, but I did not ask them to answer the key questions of the questionnaire, which consisted of assorted questions, so that a variety of useful data were obtained. However, all incomplete responses are unaccounted for, and were discarded immediately.

For my secondary research, I took help of the internet to find out about anything that are related to long distance relationships. I managed to find two online articles that provided me with useful data on the research topic. The internet also further referred me to two books and two movies that were related to the project. I also searched for books on long distance relationships in our library, but I was unable to find any. This will be further discussed in my “limitations” section.
Primary Data Presentation & Analysis

This section showcases the findings from my primary research, that is, the survey I carried out.

Before moving on to the main data analysis, we will take a brief look into some general information about the survey.

The total number of responses that I could take into account was 25. Despite my efforts to achieve an equal ratio between both the genders, the best I could get was a 32% to 68% ratio between females, denoted by the red segment of the doughnut above, and males, denoted the blue portion. That means, out of the 25 respondents, 8 were female and the rest, that is 17, were male.
The chart above shows the age distribution among my representative sample. The horizontal axis shows the age group that the respondents belonged to and the vertical axis shows the percentage of the total respondents. As it clearly shows, most of the people, 68% or 17 out of the 25 returnees to be precise, who filled out the survey, belonged to the age group of 18-21. 24% or, 6 respondents were aged 22-25 years, with the rest being above 25 years old.
I asked my respondents whether they support long distance relationships or not. 64% of my total respondents said, yes, they do support long distance relationships. However, 36% of them said they do not support long distance relationship.
When asked long distance relationship has been increasing in Bangladesh, 20 respondents, which is 80% of the total respondents, yes. Long distance relationship has indeed increased in Bangladesh. And the remaining 5 respondents, which is 20% in total doesn’t think that long distance relationships has increased in Bangladesh.
And the graph above highlights the most recurring reasons that the respondents chose when they were asked to state the reasons that were behind their long distance relationship. The horizontal axis shows the number of times a reason was chosen, while the vertical axis portrays the most common reasons that were stated in the questionnaires.
I asked them a question which is internet which is very cost effective is the main reason of long distance relationships, most of the respondents, to be exact 52% of them agreed with me & 28% of them strongly agreed. However 12% answered neither agree nor disagree & 8% of them totally disagreed in this matter.
When asked whether they have ever been in a long distance relationship, 14 respondents, who make up 56% of the total respondents, said that they were involved in one at some point in their lives. From now onwards, we will only be focusing on the responses of these 14, as the 44% who were never in long distance relationships were not asked any of the other important questions as it seemed pretty normal for them not to know about the different aspects of such a relationship.
The pie chart above represents those 14 people who said they have been in a long distance relationship at least once. I went on to ask these people whether they are still in a long distance relationship or not, and 71% of them responded that, yes, they are still in a long distance relationship. In numeric terms, that made up of 10 of those 14 people. The rest, that is only 4 of them, said that they are not in a long distance relationship anymore. However, we should not jump to the conclusion that their relationships did not last; it can be possible that they just do not live away from their partners anymore.
The questionnaire then asked the respondents on whether they thought long distance relationships can last. The pie chart above shows the answers that were received. The blue portion of the pie chart shows the people who thought long distance relationships can last, and they represented 76% of the total people who were interviewed. That is, 19 of the 25 respondents believed that long distance relationships can last, with the rest 24%, or, 6 people saying that such a relationship cannot last.
The chart above shows the various reasons that the respondents think are mostly responsible for long distance relationships to end. The horizontal axis shows the reasons that were stated in the survey and the vertical axis shows the percentage of people who felt a certain reason is behind the break-up of such an affair. Most of them, 76% to be precise, feel that mistrust is the reason. Only 20% of them think that issues of distance can be a problem & 4% opted for financial issues.
This question was asked as an add-on to the previous question and everyone was asked to answer this, unlike the previous question. Most people, 36% to be exact, think that physical desires does influence on their decision on whether or not to be in long distance relationships. However, 32% neither agreed nor disagreed in this matter. 24% of the respondents strongly agreed & 8% disagree that physicality does not play a vital role in long distance relationship.
In the final major question of my survey, the people of my representative sampling were asked what they thought society’s, especially parents’ and elders’, reaction would be when they get to learn about their long distance relationship. As expected, the majority, that is, 52% of them replied that they expect a hostile reception from their elders, with only 20% saying that they will get a warm treatment. 28% said that they will probably get an indifferent reaction.
When asked whether society’s hostile mindset can be changed, 72% of those who thought they would receive a hostile response believe that it can be said. However 16% answered No & 12 answered Maybe as a option of this question.
This question was asked most people, 52% to be exact, think that various problems arise in a long distance relationship & can pose legitimate threat to the relationships. However, 32% strongly agreed in this matter. 4% of the respondents disagreed that various problems does not arise in a long distance relationship & cannot pose legitimate threat to the relationships.
I asked the respondents how they feel most long distance relationships start off, so as to get an indirect insight on how their long distance relationship started. 19 out of the 25 believe that most long distance relationships start off when someone moves away to a different country. And 2 of them answered others. Only 4 think that they start off by meeting the significant other through the internet, leading me to believe that theirs started off in the same way. However, I am not wholly sure of it, so, we will not jump to any conclusions here.
I mostly relied on my secondary sources for general ideas on my topic. I, however, could not find anything directly related to Bangladeshi couples in long distance relationships. So I had to settle for general worldwide data that were, however, directly connected to long distance relationships.

To couples who are engaged in long distance relationships, everything seems out of the world about their relationship. They can sometimes go to any extent to make their relationship work, just like Jacob and Anna, two people who met in college, who overcame the barriers of immigration problems and psychological dilemmas to make their trans-Atlantic relationship work (*Like Crazy*, 2011). That is not all. *Like Crazy* (2011) is loosely based on the real-life experiences of its director, Doremus, meaning that things like this do not only happen in movies; they are very much present in the real world.

Also, long distance relationships do not always necessarily occur between people who have met each other. There are many cases in this world, where people have fallen in love with someone they met at a blog or website. A perfect example of such a relationship is portrayed in *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), a romantic comedy film that portrays the love story between a man named Sam Baldwin and a woman named Annie Reed. Sam and Annie lived in complete opposite coasts of the United States of America and met over a radio show when Sam, persuaded by his son, was talking in that show about how much he misses his departed wife. Things like this happen in real life too, and there have been plenty of evidences. For example, the blog post titled “The Internet Introduced Us, We Did Everything Else” (n.d.) tells the story of a woman who met a man online and fell in love with him. The two of them are now happily married for the last 5 years. Sometimes, online long distance relationships
also occur due to the psychological state of an individual. As the psychologist Gwinnell (1998) discussed, someone may seek refuge in an online community and make pen-friends just to escape from harsh realities of the real world. These friendships develop into something more serious, leading to a long distance relationship.

Another reason that long distance relationships are rising is because more and more young people are engaging in them. As Jayson (2010) discussed in her article, the ease with which an individual can communicate over the internet makes it easier for young couples to be together even when they have to relocate for reasons that maybe related to work or education. Softwares, such as Skype, have also made it easier for partners to have more face time with each other without meeting. Even though Skype may not allow the couple to touch each other, it does allow them to see each other just by the use of a computer and an internet connection. Voo (2007) also points out some ways that a long distance couple can use to make sure that their relationship do not get boring. She asks her reader to “tap their creativity” and “trust each other”, saying that long distance relationships do not have to be boring and can be very interesting even without the presence of sex. Narayan (2005) further goes to add that when in a long distance relationship, a couple does not necessarily have to put in too many extra effort. All they have to do is maintain a good schedule when it comes to meeting the partner after a long time, because she believes that “being consistent helps your lives together or apart”. Narayan (2005) also says that even though conflicts are a natural part of a long distance relationship, it is important that a good understanding is always maintained between the couple, so that, despite the various hiccups that the relationship can provide, it can also be made to last.

However, Scheve (n.d.) argues that such modes of communications “often don’t pay off with a truly fulfilling interaction”. He also points out add that despite this advanced mode of communication between couples, issues of mistrust and doubt still linger. As a matter of
fact, he argues that these methods of close communication gives more rise to suspicion between couples when someone appears a bit happy sometimes. However, Guldner (2004) suggests the complete opposite, further going on to add in his book that the frequency of communication between partners “has almost no impact on whether they stayed together or the quality of the relationship”.

Despite my best efforts to find out more secondary data, these were the only ones that seemed authenticate and truly related to my topic. I have discussed this shortage of secondary sources further in the “limitations” section.
Summary of Research Findings

This paper covers four main aspects of a long distance relationship. By researching on long distance relationships, I mean only relationships that span over two different countries or continents. I worked on finding out the number of reasons behind long distance relationships and I came upon that in most cases, there were more than one reasons involved. The most recurring reasons that the respondents stated were that their partners moved abroad due to work and educational obligations and that they have been in the relationship too long to break it up just because someone is moving away. They did agree with my opinion that long distance relationships can indeed last. However, I found a rather differing view when I wanted to know how many factors can end such a relationship, because everyone who believed long distance relationships cannot last also said that a single reason is good enough for them to end, as opposed to the various reasons that I assumed I would find. Lastly, I set out on finding about society’s possible reaction to long distance relationships, with majority of the respondents saying that they expected a hostile reaction from their parents and elders. However, most of them believed that this hostile reception can be changed to a warmer mindset later on.
Limitation

Even though the data that could be collected from the primary research answered my research questions, I doubt whether they are truly accurate to the highest degrees. A topic like this may have led some people to answer using their feelings, not their heads. Also, selecting a fairly representative sample was tough as many people declined to fill up the survey, especially due to the sensitivity of the topic. Finding adequate secondary data was difficult too, and, in the end, I could only gather general information from my secondary research due to the total absence of any previous research work about this topic in Bangladesh’s context. I could not find any books on the topic in our university library and furthermore, I also could not manage the full versions of the books I used for my secondary research despite my best efforts to manage them, and had to rely on abstracts in the end. The time constraint was also an obstacle, and I believe that if I had more time, I would have at least targeted a wider spectrum of people for my representative sample, which would have allowed me to gather more accurate data.
**Recommendation**

Even after my utmost efforts, I don’t believe that I could cover every aspects of the research, given the time constraints. If someone else would want to carry on with this research project, I would suggest they also consider a higher age group for their representative sampling. They would also be benefitted if they can interview both partners in a couple, something that I could not do. And also, I did not ask the society, as in parents and elders, first-hand about their point of view. It is possible that their reaction could be more lenient than what the representatives thought. So, this is a field that could be analyzed further. There may also be more short-comings that I did not noticed, but that may also need to be addressed.
Conclusion

After the primary and secondary data were carefully examined and referred to, three of my hypothesis; as of such, stood firm. I could conclude that the number of long distance relationships in Bangladesh has indeed increased and that there are various reasons behind a couple’s decision to be in one. I also found out that most respondents did agree with me to the suggestion that long distance relationships can indeed come to fruition in the future. However, when asked, everyone disagreed that various reasons are behind the break up of such a relationship, making it quite clear that one reason is good enough for a long distance affair to fall apart, the majority of them pointing out distance as the reason. My last hypothesis was proved to be partially true, because, even though most respondents did think that society would have a hostile attitude towards their affair, they however, believed that this reaction can be changed in their favor, will only one respondent skeptic about their chances.

When all's said and done, I enjoyed carrying out this research work and I also hope whoever continues this will also share my opinion.
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