Do we visit, call, or email?
Media matter in close relationships

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ABSTRACT
People use a variety of media to communicate with family and friends, though the evidence is sparse regarding whether differences in the quality of social relationships can be explained, in part, by differences in the media they use. Participants (N=446) in a longitudinal study of household technology use were asked to generate the names of up to 5 family or friends who lived nearby and up to 5 family and friends who lived far away. For each relationship at three points during the course of one year, respondents reported the frequency of face-to-face, phone, and email communication as well as how close they felt toward them. Analyses indicated that an increase in phone communication was most strongly associated with an increase in feelings of closeness, regardless of whether family and friends were nearby or far away.

INTRODUCTION
The Interact has pervaded our social lives more than any other technology since the introduction of the telephone. People increasingly use the Interact to participate in on-line communities, to meet people through the World Wide Web, and of course, to send email to family and friends [2,4]. Previous investigations suggest a mixed bag of consequences for relying on the Interact to communicate with others, ranging from enhanced feelings of identity for stigmatized group members to a decrease in psychological well-being for Internet users [3,5]. At the heart of the controversy is whether the Internet supports or detracts from the development of meaningful relationships. To date, there has been surprisingly little research on the link between the use of different communication media over time and the ensuing quality of social relationships.
In addition to answering questions about technology use, participants were asked to name up to 10 non-household family or friends nearest to them in age (m=8.31, sd=2.35). They listed up to 5 people (m=4.88, sd=1.42) living nearby and up to 5 people (m=3.43, sd=1.93) living far away. For each of these relationships, participants indicated their age (Adult-90%, Friend-43%), relationship (Family-40%, Friend-54%), distance away in miles (Distance: nearby-m=9.90, sd=11.13; far away-m=679.95, sd=935.13; combined-m=314.71, sd=718.90), frequency of face-to-face (Face-to-face: never;5:daily; m=2.95, sd=1.13), phone (Phone: never;5:daily; m=2.99, sd=1.12), and email (Email: never;5:daily; m=1.51, sd=1.04), and feelings of closeness (Close-1:not close;5:very close; m=3.62, sd=1.16). Participants were also asked for their own age (Adult-88%) and sex (Male-46%). Three additional control variables were used: sample (Tvsample-27%), number (Number-1-5 name generation order) and wave (Wave-1-3 time period).

RESULTS
Table 1 shows the analyses predicting change in feelings of closeness from change in frequency of face-to-face, phone, and email communication over three time periods for nearby (Model 1), far away (Model 2), and combined (Model 3) relationships. The results clearly indicate that some media matter more than others for developing close relationships. Increases in all communication media were significantly related to an increase in closeness (Model 3), though the association for phone communication (B=-.310) was much stronger than for face-to-face (B=.213), and face-to-face communication was much stronger than for email (B=.085), regardless of whether family and friends were nearby or far away (Model 1 and Model 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model (DV)</th>
<th>1 (Δ CLOSE) Nearby</th>
<th>2 (ΔCLOSE) Far Away</th>
<th>3 (ΔCLOSE) Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV (scale)</td>
<td>B (Std. Error)</td>
<td>B (Std. Error)</td>
<td>B (Std. Error)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.910 (0.053)</td>
<td>2.037 (0.049)</td>
<td>2.012 (0.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tvsample (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.024 (0.061)</td>
<td>0.064 (0.085)</td>
<td>-0.025 (0.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (0-1)</td>
<td>0.216* (0.084)</td>
<td>0.433*** (0.112)</td>
<td>0.343*** (0.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.155** (0.055)</td>
<td>-0.125* (0.072)</td>
<td>-0.161** (0.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.243* (0.121)</td>
<td>0.030 (0.123)</td>
<td>-0.274** (0.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.101** (0.037)</td>
<td>-0.133*** (0.040)</td>
<td>-0.123*** (0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (0-1)</td>
<td>0.644*** (0.067)</td>
<td>0.586*** (0.112)</td>
<td>0.679*** (0.059)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, tp < .10

Table 1. Maximum likelihood estimates for nearby (Model 1, df=5,821), far away (Model 2, df=4,384), and combined (Model 3, df=10,220) relationships. Note: Because observations are not independent, Hierarchical Linear Modeling software was used to take into account the unique variance associated with the reported relationships.

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REFERENCES