

Interpersonal Communication and Listening Barriers in the Era of Mediated-Communication

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Abstract

In the era of mediated communication, individuals today rely heavily on digital platforms for interaction. However, text-based and audiovisual communication on social media often causes distortions in the listening process of interpersonal communication. This study aims to analyze the listening barriers of interpersonal communication in the era of mediated-communication. A descriptive qualitative approach. Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews to obtain informants' direct experiences related to listening barriers. Findings show that listening barriers to interpersonal communication in the era of mediated communication are caused by three factors. These barriers include 1) environmental barriers both offline and online, in particularly information overload and notification disruptions, 2) physiological and psychological barriers, such as shorter attention spans, digital anxiety, and confirmation bias, and 3) mechanical barriers, decreased sensitivity and skill to the reading of nonverbal cues and paralinguistic signals. The existence of these obstacles fosters pervasive unilateral misconceptions, increases pseudo-conflicts, and reduces empathy and emotional closeness. This study concludes that pseudo-digital connectivity actually hinders real connectivity resulting in superficial relationships due to failure in the deep listening process.

Keywords: *Interpersonal Communication, Listening Barriers, Mediated Communication, Social Media.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication has undergone a drastic shift along with the dominance of digital technology in daily life. In the era of mediated communication, individuals now rely heavily on social media as the main space to build and maintain social relationships (Anggraini et al., 2022). However, this transition from face-to-face interaction to digital interaction brings complex new challenges, especially related to how individuals pay attention, understand, and respond to messages from their interlocutors (Kustiawan et al., 2022).

Majority of individual is growing up along with the massive penetration of the internet, smartphones, and social media algorithms. In the communication landscape, individual show a strong preference for visual-based exchanges, concise texts, and instant responses (Rastati, 2018). Their interaction style is heavily influenced by digital culture, which is characterized by a reliance on social media, multitasking habits, and the use of artificial elements, such as emojis, to replace physical presence (Fadillah et al., 2022).

Listening is not just limited to auditory activities. It extends to the ability to absorb, interpret, and understand text and audiovisual messages (Priyono, 2022). Unfortunately, the listening process is often interrupted by various listening barriers that reduce the quality of interpersonal communication (Tyagi, 2013). Listening

barriers include any form of distraction, distortion, or stimuli that prevent the recipient from successfully understanding the essential meaning intended by the sender (Lunenborg, 2010). This barrier triggers communication disorders, in which the interpreted message deviates from the sender's original intention. In interpersonal communication, the presence of a listening barrier consistently reduces the quality of intimacy, cognitive understanding, and empathy between individuals (Hulbert, 1989).

Information overload is one of the primary challenges that individuals currently encounter. Users become overwhelmed with hundreds of notifications, visually appealing content, and trends that fluctuate in a matter of seconds on social media (Erza, 2020). This dense flow of information readily disrupts concentration, rendering it challenging for individuals to provide the full attention required to listen attentively during interpersonal interactions with others (Hidayatullah & Winduwati, 2023).

In addition to external digital factors, a psychological aspect that has begun to be addressed now is the tendency towards short attention spans, which is also a significant internal barrier (Diz, 2021). The habit of consuming short-form content fosters impatience when processing long messages or requires deep contemplation. As a result, listening in interpersonal communication often only fleets, ignoring important details, and giving hasty responses without comprehensive understanding (Sebanescu, 2022).

The high barrier to listening directly affects the quality of interpersonal relationships. Despite being digitally connected with hundreds of people simultaneously, feelings of loneliness and emotional isolation persist due to in-person interactions that are not well established. Without awareness of the need to overcome these listening barriers, interpersonal communication in cyberspace will only lead to superficial interactions that are fragile and without empathy.

B. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the phenomenon of listening barriers in interpersonal communication in the era of media communication. A qualitative approach was chosen to explain the social reality of psychological dynamics experienced by informants in the context of digital space (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews to obtain informants' direct experiences related to listening barriers. In addition, digital observations of informants' social media interaction patterns and textual documentation studies served as secondary data to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Informants were selected using objective sampling based on specific criteria, active social media users (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp), frequently interacted with media communications, and reported experiencing listening barriers in interpersonal communication. The data that had been found, were analyzed interactively using a qualitative data analysis model that included data reduction, data display, and conclusion retrieval or verification by Miles and Huberman. To ensure

the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher used triangulation of sources and techniques, thus ensuring that the data and its interpretation formulated about the listening barrier was valid and credible.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Identifying Listening Barriers in Mediated Communication Era

Based on the finding, the phenomenon of listening barriers in the interpersonal communication landscape in the era of media-mediated communication manifests as a multi-layered disruption structure. Listening barriers do not stand as isolated problems, but rather as complex interactions between external media factors and the user's internal psychological factors. The nature of instant communication in cyberspace changes the way messages are decoded, triggering various forms of distortion of meaning (Coburn, 2011).

The first type of barrier that is consistently identified is the environmental barrier. Environmental barriers are usually in the form of physical noise or distance. However, with the advent of social media, environmental barriers are not only physical noise but also in the form of digital pollution that manipulates visual and mental focus. Virtual environments are designed to continuously capture the user's attention through a variety of dynamic visual and auditory stimuli (Pierro et al., 2005). The most obvious manifestation of this digital environment barrier is the phenomenon of information overload. Individuals face an overwhelming flow of information, ranging from status updates, video uploads, targeted ads to messages from multiple contacts simultaneously. When trying to respond to interpersonal messages, the individual's cognitive capacity is already overwhelmed by the flood of other information. Therefore, message understanding becomes less than optimal (Erment et al., 2022).

In addition to information overload, the constant interruption of app notifications is also a very damaging environmental nuisance. The psychological urge to immediately open notifications that appear on the device screen often causes the distraction on the listening process in interpersonal communication (Mehrotra et al., 2016). Research participants reported difficulty maintaining focus on a face-to-face conversation, because their attention was constantly distracted by incoming notifications from various other social media platforms. Sometimes, it just wants to keep up with the latest news from the social media used.

The second form of barrier pertains to the user's internal characteristics, specifically the physiological barriers that are linked to cognitive capacity. The habit of consuming short-form micro-content, such as those found on TikTok or Instagram Reels, is gradually changing the way brain functions. Constant exposure to rapid stimuli has led to a sustained decline in focus, commonly referred to as short attention spans. This reduced attention span directly affects an individual's ability to engage in deep listening (Kushlev et al., 2016). When it faced with long messages, individual tend to become impatient. As a result, they overlook important details and often draw conclusions too early.

This physiological state fosters a tendency toward selective listening. Individuals often focus only on the parts of the message that directly catch their attention or are in tune with the current mood. This fragmented listening pattern causes individuals to miss the full context of the speaker's message. Therefore, it is lowering the quality of interpersonal understanding. Related into internal factors, psychological barriers also play an important role in distorting messages. The nature of social media which demands quick responses, often triggers anxiety. Anxiety related to response speed or fear of making typos changes the mental orientation from listening to understand to simply listening to reply (Vanden Abeele et al., 2016) which is also applied in face-to-face conversations.

These psychological barriers are further exacerbated by the profoundly embedded confirmation bias that is common in digital culture. It is common for individuals to express their personal preferences onto the messages of others, as it is accustomed to operating in the echo chambers created by social media algorithms. The meaning of interpersonal messages that do not align with the expectations or perspectives of individuals is unconsciously filtered, rejected, or altered. The medium itself is subject to structural limitations or mechanical barriers in this type of barrier. Social media platforms are intrinsically not fully capable of replicating the intimacy of in-person interactions (Hian et al., 2004). despite their sophistication. These obstacles are most apparent in text-based communication, as digital platforms do not allow for the inherent presence of nonverbal cues.

In direct interpersonal communication, nonverbal cues, such as eye contact, hand gestures, and posture, serve as contextual anchors that clarify the intent behind a message. In social media, the absence of these physical elements creates an information vacuum. Individuals often cannot guess the emotional state of the conversation partner, as they are accustomed not observing the sender's facial expressions or body language in digital communication (Hales et al., 2018). The absence of paralinguistic cues, such as intonation, word emphasis, and vocal tone, also serves as a mechanical barrier that complicates the decoding process. The similar sentence can convey diverse meanings depending on whether it is said in a joking, cynical, or serious tone. Without this vocal dimension, individuals are particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation. Messages intended to be neutral or humorous are often perceived as short or angry.

Although social media offers artificial features, such as emojis, stickers to replace nonverbal cues, the use of these visual elements often creates new barriers. Individuals use highly specific subjective interpretations and group-based cultural codes when giving meaning to emojis Akadal & Söyük (2022). Differences in how users interpret emojis often complicate the process of receiving messages and trigger more complex distortions of understanding. This series of listening barriers, ranging from environmental noise both online and offline, shorter attention spans, psychological anxiety to media engagement, undermines the effectiveness of listening.

2. Implications of Listening Barriers to Interpersonal Communication

The layered barriers that distort individuals' ability to listen to each other fully and clearly in the age of mediated communication are not just temporary technical distractions. This carries profound impact for the quality of human relationships. When the process of listening is repeatedly distorted, the fundamental foundations of interpersonal communication begin to weaken. Relationships that should be built on the basis of understanding each other holistically gradually turn into a series of artificial and mechanical message exchanges.

The most apparent consequence of these recurrent listening obstacles is typically misinterpretation. The individual's fragmented attention frequently results in paralinguistic cues and nonverbal signals being overlooked, leading to a significant contextual void. The listener often inadvertently fills in the voids with one-sided interpretations, individual assumptions, or negative emotional assumptions that fail to accurately convey the communicator's actual intent (Edwards et al., 2017).

Due to this misunderstanding, there is a significant likelihood of pseudo-conflicts. Barriers to attentive listening not only led to conflict but also weaken emotional closeness in personal relationships. Individuals become accustomed to quick messages for purpose of efficiency. As a result, individuals frequently forfeit their capacity to comprehend implicit grievances or emotional subtleties that demand considerable sensitivity.

This situation is further exacerbated by the declining of empathy triggered by digital interactions. Interpersonal empathy can only develop when both parties engage in mindful listening and giving full attention (Worthington & Bodie, 2023). However, due to environmental barriers such as information overload and constant notification interruptions, individuals often fail to understand on the emotional vulnerability signals shared by the interlocutor.

The absence of empathy hinders the listening process, as the listener is not truly engaged in understanding the speaker's points of view and emotions. It stimulates inappropriate responses, ignorance of other individual's feelings, and possible defensive response. The speaker perceives an absence in attention, reduced transparency, weakened trust, and a conversation less conducive to fostering cooperative solutions (Davidson et al, 2004; Gearhart & Bodie, 2011; Vickery et al., 2015;

According to Greer et al. (2008) barriers to listening change the ways of conflict resolution that individuals prefer to choose destructive defense mechanisms such as ghosting or one-side cutting off communication. When interpersonal messages feel too complex to process that trigger anxiety, exacerbated by short attention spans, individuals often choose to ignore the message rather than solve the problem. This reduces the individual's resilience to face healthy interpersonal conflict dynamics.

In addition, the implications of this listening barrier extend to the formation of self-concept. Accustomed to selective listening driven by algorithmic confirmation bias, individuals become less tolerant of different viewpoints in interpersonal communication (Minson & Dorison, 2022). Individuals tend to limit interactions to

only individuals who validate the ego, thus narrowing the space for emotional maturation that typically arises from diverse interpersonal dialogues.

In more formal or professional contexts, such as communication between students and lecturers or among young peers, this listening barrier contributes to a decline in professionalism. The habit of skimming messages often causes individuals to ignore important instructions, make mistakes in completing assignments, or give irrelevant responses. These communication distortions can be detrimental to the individual's academic reputation and career development.

From a psychosocial perspective, dependence on information-rich digital interactions fosters individuals who are vulnerable to social fatigue (Sheng et al., 2023). Decoding ambiguous texts without physical cues requires great cognitive energy. Many individuals experience mental fatigue after prolonged online interpersonal interactions, prompting them to withdraw from social environments. These implications lead to the conclusion that social media has created new barriers to interpersonal communication. While digital technologies bridge spatial distances, it simultaneously encourages emotional isolation due to listening barriers that reduce the essence of interpersonal communication. The quality of human connection and the profundity of meaning are sacrificed in favor of the speed and volume of messages.

Real connectivity is actually hindered by pseudo-digital connectivity, which leads to superficial relationships as a result of the failure to engage in attentive listening. It is imperative that individuals recognize the importance of establishing healthy and resilient interpersonal relationships. This demand is irrevocable, necessitating the capacity to retrain attention spans, filter out external distractions, and cultivate empathic listening.

D. CONCLUSION

The high prevalence of auditory barriers has resulted in a decline in the quality of interpersonal communication in the mediated communication era. These barriers are multifaceted, encompassing a variety of factors, including environmental factors both online and offline, such as information overload and notification interference, internal factors include shorter attention spans, digital anxiety, and confirmation bias, and mechanical constraints, such as decreased sensitivity and skills to the reading of nonverbal cues and paralinguistic signals. The interconnectedness of these disruptions results in a form of digital communication pollution that diminishes an individual's ability to listen attentively. The message's true essence is obscured by the instantaneous and fragmented nature of interactions. The erosion of the foundations of interpersonal relationships is significantly impacted by this situation. The escalation of conflict frequently founded on the incorrect premise is a consequence of the declining capacity to anchor physical and vocal contexts, which results in a degree of unilateral misinterpretation. The relationship's empathy and intimacy levels are reduced as a result of the failure to comprehend the emotional subtleties of conversation partners, which ultimately results in pseudo-connectivity. Social media connections do not necessarily indicate that individuals are close and tangible in

interpersonal communication. This investigation summarizes that proficiency in digital technology does not necessarily equate to effective communication. In short, individuals should consciously endeavor to develop focused attention and engage in empathic mindful listening to mitigate listening barriers in interpersonal communication.

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