

Chapter 3

Online Social Networking and Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

With the increased popularity of social media, social networking sites (SNSs) have received the attention of many scholars. In particular, researchers have focused on the impact of SNSs on interpersonal relationships. Accordingly, this chapter provides an overview of the extant literature concerning associations between the use of SNSs and romantic relationships. It provides empirical evidence on how social networking behaviors are influenced by adult attachment styles, and how social networking influences relationship constructs such as satisfaction, commitment, jealousy, and relationship dissolution. Furthermore, it presents previous research that emphasizes gender as a moderator in these relations. This chapter overall contributes to researchers and professionals in providing information on online social networking and emphasizing key romantic relationship constructs related to the use of SNSs. It also provides suggestions for future research.

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INTRODUCTION

With the advances in wireless communication technologies, social media use has become prevalent among individuals. To illustrate, the number of active users of social media around the world was 2.46 billion in 2017 and this number is expected to reach to 3.02 billion by 2021 (Statista Facts on Social Networks, 2018). Given its prevalence and importance in interpersonal communication, scholars have shown an interest in online social networking and conducted numerous research to understand its influence on interpersonal relationships. In particular, they have focused on Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook or Twitter, and addressed several characteristics of individuals, such as attachment style (Emery, Muise, Dix, & Le, 2014a; Fox & Warber, 2014) and SNSs-induced jealousy (Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009; 2014; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011) as well as relationship characteristics such as relationship happiness (Mod, 2010; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011), satisfaction (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Saslow, Muise, Impett, & Dubin, 2013), commitment (Dibble & Drouin, 2014; Drouin, Miller, & Dibble, 2014) and dissolution (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; Clayton, 2014) as outcomes or predictors of SNSs-related behaviors of partners in a romantic relationship.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the extant literature concerning associations among the use of SNSs and romantic relationship constructs. Given that SNSs enable public communication between partners (Billedo, Kerkhof, & Finkenauer, 2015) and may either damage or benefit an emotional relationship between partners, the investigation of the associations between the use of SNSs and romantic relationship constructs is warranted. Accordingly, this chapter provides information on how the use of SNSs influences and is influenced by individual and relationship characteristics. Furthermore, plausible moderators and mediators in these relations are explained. Thus, this chapter would contribute to researchers and communication professionals in providing information on online social networking and emphasizing key romantic relationship constructs related to the use of SNSs. It also provides suggestions for future research directions.

Several issues are addressed in this chapter. First, online social networking is introduced and the emergent interest in SNSs is discussed. Second, the research addressing online social networking and romantic relationships are reviewed. To do so, EBSCOhost, Psych ARTICLES and Scopus electronic databases were used to search several keywords such as *social media*, *social networking sites*, *online social networking*, *intimacy*, *romantic relationship*, *jealousy*, *satisfaction*, *commitment*, *etc.* The articles were primarily chosen from those published in the past 10 years. Lastly, the findings of the current literature are summarized, and limitations and suggestions for future research are mentioned.

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