

Impact of social media on the commitment, satisfaction, and emotional availability in romantic relations

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Abstract—The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the structure of romantic relationships in modern society. While digital platforms have increased opportunities for communication and emotional connection, they have also influenced commitment patterns, emotional availability, patience, and relationship satisfaction. The present paper explores the psychological and behavioral impact of social media on romantic relationships, focusing on instant gratification, unrealistic expectations, validation-seeking behavior, emotional intimacy, and changing commitment dynamics. The paper integrates psychological theories such as attachment theory, social exchange theory, and choice overload theory along with findings from contemporary studies on social media usage and relationship behavior. The paper concludes that social media itself is neither inherently destructive nor beneficial, rather it amplifies existing psychological tendencies and reshapes the experience of intimacy and emotional connection in the digital era.

I. INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships have undergone substantial transformation in the age of digital communication. Earlier forms of romantic connection were often characterized by emotional patience, gradual attachment, limited social exposure, and sustained interpersonal investment. Communication occurred slowly through letters, occasional meetings, or delayed conversations, which unintentionally strengthened anticipation, emotional endurance and commitment. In contrast, social media has accelerated interpersonal interaction and created continuous accessibility. Individuals today are exposed to numerous potential partners, idealized relationship portrayals, and constant emotional stimulation. As a result, modern romantic relationships increasingly operate within a culture of immediacy, comparison, and emotional

unpredictability. According to a report by Data Reportal (2024) the average internet user spends approximately 2 hours and 23 minutes daily on social media platforms. Such prolonged engagement significantly affects emotional perception, relational expectations, and interpersonal behavior.

The present paper aims to examine how social media influences commitment, emotional satisfaction, attachment patterns, and psychological functioning in romantic relationships.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory suggests that early emotional experiences influence adult romantic relationships. Individuals with anxious attachment styles often seek reassurance and constant communication, while avoidant individuals may prefer emotionally distant interactions.

Research by Oldmeadow, Quinn, and Kowert (2013) found that attachment anxiety is positively associated with excessive social media monitoring in romantic relationships, particularly through checking messages, online activity, and emotional validation behaviors. Social media intensifies these attachment tendencies by providing continuous access to relational information.

2.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory proposes that individuals evaluate relationships based on rewards, costs, and available alternatives.

Social media continuously exposes users to alternative romantic possibilities, idealized lifestyles, and attractive identities. This abundance of alternatives

may reduce emotional investment in existing relationships.

A study by Rus and Tiemensma (2017) reported that excessive exposure to idealized online relationship often lowers relationship satisfaction and increase relational comparison.

2.3 Choice Overload Theory

Choice overload theory explains that excessive option can increase dissatisfaction and indecisiveness.

Digital platforms create the illusion that there is always someone “better” available. Consequently, individuals may struggle to fully commit emotionally because they remain psychologically aware of multiple alternatives.

Psychologist Barry Schwartz, in *The Paradox of Choice* (2004), argues that excessive options often reduce satisfaction rather than increase it.

Table 1. Comparison Between Earlier and Digital-Age Relationships

Earlier Relationship Patterns	Digital-Age Relationships
Slow communication	Instant communication
Emotional patience	Immediate emotional gratification
Limited social exposure	Endless relational alternatives
Long-term emotional investment	Short-term emotional engagement
Private emotional experiences	Public validation and display
Stronger tolerance for uncertainty	Increased anxiety and reassurance-seeking
Fewer comparisons	Constant comparison through curated content

III. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 Instant Gratification and Reduced Patience

Social media platforms function through rapid reward systems involving likes, replies, notifications, and constant interaction. Such systems gradually reduce tolerance for emotional waiting and uncertainty.

Research conducted by Alter (2017) on behavioral addiction suggests that instant digital rewards

condition individuals to expect quick emotional responses and continuous stimulation.

As a result, many modern relationships become emotionally reactive rather than emotionally resilient. Individuals may withdraw from relationships when emotional effort, discomfort, or patience becomes necessary.

3.2 Emotional Availability and Fear of Intimacy

Modern digital communication often encourages emotional performance instead of emotional vulnerability. Individuals may seek attention, reassurance, and emotional validation online while simultaneously avoiding genuine intimacy.

According to Turkle (2015), digital communication allows people to remain “constantly connected yet emotionally distant”.

This creates a paradox where individuals desire love and validation but fear emotional dependence and vulnerability.

IV. UNREALISTIC RELATIONSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Social media platforms frequently display idealized images of love, beauty, romance, and happiness. Exposure to these curated portrayals often creates unrealistic expectations regarding relationships.

A survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2020) found that nearly 45% of young adults reported feeling insecure or dissatisfied after comparing their relationships with online portrayals of couples.

Continuous comparison may increase dissatisfaction within otherwise healthy relationships.

V. VALIDATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Social media encourages external validation through likes, comments, reactions, and attention. Over time, emotional self-worth may become dependent upon digital approval.

Research by Andreassen et al. (2017) demonstrated a strong relationship between excessive social media use, narcissistic tendencies, and validation-seeking behavior.

This dependence on external affirmation may negatively affect romantic stability by increasing jealousy, insecurity, and emotional dependency.

VI. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON RELATIONSHIPS

Despite its negative consequences, social media also offers important relational advantages.

- It helps maintain long-distance relationships.
- It enables emotional communication across geographical boundaries.
- It provides emotional support for socially isolated individuals.
- It allows shy or emotionally reserved individuals to express themselves more comfortably.

A study by Jiang and Hancock (2013) found that online communication can sometimes increase emotional disclosure and perceived intimacy, particularly during the early stages of relationships. Thus, social media can strengthen emotional connection when used consciously and responsibly.

VII. PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Social media does not create emotional tendencies independently, rather, it amplifies existing psychological patterns. Individuals with anxious attachment styles may become excessively dependent on digital reassurance. Avoidant individuals may prefer emotionally controlled online interactions that provide connection without vulnerability.

Neuropsychologically, social media activates dopamine-based reward systems associated with anticipation, validation, and emotional stimulation. Notifications and emotional responses create repetitive cycles of reward anticipation, reinforcing digital attachment behaviors. Consequently, social media increasingly influences emotional regulation, relational expectations, and perceptions of intimacy.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Social media has fundamentally transformed modern romantic relationships by reshaping communication patterns, emotional attachment, commitment and satisfaction. While, it increases accessibility and connection, it also encourages instant gratification, comparison, emotional avoidance, and unrealistic expectations. However, social media itself should not be viewed as entirely harmful or entirely beneficial. Its

impact largely depends on individuals' emotional maturity, attachment patterns, psychological awareness, and relational behavior.

Modern relationships are not necessarily becoming less emotional, rather they are becoming emotionally different. Understanding these evolving dynamics is essential for developing healthier, emotionally conscious and meaningful relationships in the digital era.

IX. FUTURE SCOPE

Further empirical research may explore the relationship between social media usage patterns, attachment styles, and relationship satisfaction through quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

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