Falling Prey to Online Romantic Alternatives-Evaluating Social Media Alternative Partners in Committed Versus Dating Relationships

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Falling Prey to Online Romantic Alternatives: Evaluating Social Media Alternative Partners in Committed Versus Dating Relationships

Irum Saeed Abbasi

Abstract
Social media represents an integral platform that is currently used to maintain and develop new social connections including alternative romantic partners. Over engagement with online friends and pursuing alternative partners can potentially threaten the primary romantic relationship. In the present study, the author examined if the partners’ relationship status is a predictor of relationship satisfaction, quality of online romantic alternatives, online infidelity-related behaviors, social media addiction, and the total number of social networking sites (SNSs) accounts. In a cross-sectional study, romantic partners ($N = 578$, 378 females and 200 males) completed a battery of self-report scales. The partners were divided into two groups based on their relationship status: Those who reported to be in a committed relationship ($n = 330$) and those who reported to be in a casual dating relationship ($n = 248$). Results revealed that there is a significant between-group difference in the way both groups evaluated the quality of potential alternative partners and level of SNSs addiction. However, there was no between-group difference in relationship satisfaction, SNSs infidelity behaviors, or the total number of SNSs accounts. The dating group reported significantly more sexual alternatives than the committed group. However, the number of potential committed alternatives was not significantly different between the two groups. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

Keywords
alternative partners, infidelity behaviors, social networking, SNS addiction, relationship satisfaction, romantic relationship

The Internet provides an easily available communication platform that is contemporarily used to communicate with old and new social connections. Social networking sites (SNSs) are nearly

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ubiquitous and offer a way to communicate within and regarding interpersonal relationships (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013). There are many social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Myspace, Snapchat, and Instagram) that flaunt a competing set of idiosyncrasies. These SNSs are used to maintain and develop social and romantic connections (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; Drouin, Miller, & Dibble, 2014) including potential romantic alternatives, especially sexual alternatives (potential partners with whom one could potentially have a sexual relationship; Dibble & Drouin, 2014; Dibble, Drouin, Aune, & Boller, 2015). Connecting with romantic alternatives online has adverse relationship implications (Cravens, Leckie, & Whiting, 2013; Valenzuela, Halpern, & Katz, 2014). Even otherwise, everyday technology use causes distractions that take away the essence of being present with one’s partner and influence the quality of face-to-face interactions and family time (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, & Grant, 2011; Coyne, Stockdale, & Nelson, 2012; Leggett & Rossouw, 2014), which could negatively impact the couple’s relationship satisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Furthermore, an excessive technology use can potentially lead to decreased relationship satisfaction and even further technology use (Davids & Roberts, 2017; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). In this article, the author examined how relationship status is linked with relationship satisfaction, SNSs addiction, quality of alternatives, SNSs infidelity behaviors, total number of SNS accounts, and the number of online connections from the SNSs friends’ list that could be considered as potential committed and sexual alternatives.

The norms regarding social interactions are rapidly changing in the contemporary times. Social media offer an easy access to other users’ profiles, which allows users to discreetly collect, interpret, and evaluate online information about current, past, and potential romantic partners (Fox et al., 2013). The desire to be virtually connected with the world is dominating the conventional wisdom that advocates caution before interacting with strangers. Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) holds that in social interactions, trust and intimacy slowly unwind through self-disclosure. In the current era, however, an abundant amount of information is initially disclosed on an online profile, which violates the norms of an appropriate amount of self-disclosure at an early stage of relationship formation (Fox et al., 2013). One of the main concerns with SNSs is that its use can potentially lead to a preoccupation with SNSs (Andreassen, 2015) and some users exhibit symptoms of SNSs addiction (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, & Pallesen, 2012; Ryan, Chester, Reece, & Xenos, 2014). Researchers have classified SNSs addiction (a compulsive and uncontrolled social media use) as a component of Internet spectrum addiction disorder (Karaiskos, Tzavellas, Balta, & Paparrigopoulos, 2010), which shows many symptoms that traditionally characterize substance-related addictions (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). However, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) has not recognized SNSs addiction as a separate disorder because the research on SNS is still in its infancy (Ryan et al., 2014). The complexity is further increased due to the presence of comorbid mental disorders (e.g., personality disorders) that can confound the diagnosis of SNSs addiction (Block, 2008).

Previous research suggests that uncontrolled SNSs use can cause social overload (Maier, Launer, Eckhardt, & Weitzel, 2012), envy (Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Bruxmann, 2013; Mukesh, Mayo, & Gonçalves, 2016; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2014), anxiety (Labrague, 2014), physical and emotional infidelity, relationship dissatisfaction, and breakup (for a review, see Abbasi & Alghamdi, 2017a, 2017b; Gershon, 2010; Kerkhof, Finkenauner, & Muusses, 2011; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Moreover, recent research suggests that SNSs addiction is negatively linked with romantic relationship commitment (Abbasi, 2018). Interestingly, even SNSs interactions between romantic partners (e.g., liking, commenting on partner’s posts and pictures) may not benefit the couple. Empirical evidence suggests that couples who reported more Facebook maintenance behaviors experienced lower levels of love in their relationship (Northrup & Smith, 2016). Thus, spending excessive time on SNSs (e.g., Facebook) may lead romantic partners to be in an interpersonal conflict (Clayton, Nagurney, & Smith, 2013; Cravens et al., 2013) even if the
communication is between the dyadic partners. Another underlying cause of the conflict related to SNSs use could be related to the feelings of jealousy and suspicion arising from an excessive SNSs use (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). Suspicion may initiate interpersonal electronic surveillance: “...surreptitious strategies individuals use over communication technologies to gain awareness of another user’s offline and online behaviors” (Tokunaga, 2011, p. 706). This concerted and goal-oriented surveillance may lead partners to uncover ambiguous information that calls for further research and fuels jealousy (Muise et al., 2009). Hence, partner surveillance is another reason for developing greater (or even excessive) SNSs use (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; Helsper & Whitty, 2010; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). In essence, SNSs addiction is negatively linked with life satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Krasnova et al., 2013).

Social media facilitates communicating with alternative partners by offering easily accessible public and private tools that allow users to flirt with online friends, which can potentially facilitate emotional and sexual infidelity (Clayton et al., 2013; Drouin, Miller, & Dibble, 2015). The lack of physical presence makes online communication aggressive and encourages sharing of one’s deepest intimate desires (Carter, 2015; Helsper & Whitty, 2010). Sharing intimate thoughts and feelings with someone other than the primary partner can result in an emotional affair—the hallmark of Internet infidelity (Hertlein & Piercy, 2006). Even married individuals in a long-term relationship sometimes engage in infidelity-related behaviors via social media such as contacting old romantic partners, commenting on others’ posts and/or pictures, engaging in covert communication, hiding messages/chats, or engaging in cybersex (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; Dibble et al., 2015; Drouin et al., 2014, 2015; McDaniel, Drouin, & Cravens, 2017). Online behaviors that are considered unfaithful in a dyadic relationship include online sex, emotional involvement, emotional disclosure, cybersex, hot chatting, viewing pornography, and online dating (Dijkstra, Barelds, & Groothof, 2013; Henline, Lamke, & Howard, 2007). Social media–related infidelity leads to arguments, surveillance, retaliatory behaviors, loss of trust, and termination of the relationship (Cravens & Whiting, 2014).

Relationships formed on SNSs (e.g., Facebook) can adversely affect the primary romantic relationship (Marshall, 2012) and lower relationship commitment with the significant other (Drouin et al., 2015). Commitment is the “willingness and determination to work through troubled times” (Lauer & Lauer, 1986, p. 57). Commitment to a significant other is a robust and direct predictor of relationship stability and breakup (Agnew, 2009) and researchers consider commitment more important than relationship satisfaction in predicting if the couple would stay together or not (Rusbult, Agnew, & Ximena, 2011). Theoretically, the social exchange theories take into account the costs and benefits of remaining in a committed relationship, the barriers to quitting, and the alternate attractions to explain marital stability. For example, Levinger’s (1965) cohesiveness model holds that marital satisfaction is the result of the spouse’s weighing of attractions and rewards that are provided by the relationship, the barriers to quitting the relationship, and the alternative attractions present outside the relationship. In other words, the relationship persists when outcomes are beneficial to the partners, barriers to leaving the marriage exert a strong influence, and when the attractive alternatives are absent (Levinger, 1965; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It is notable that these attractive and barrier forces are not constant; therefore, the commitment may also fluctuate overtime (Agnew, 2009).

Interdependence theory of commitment (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) holds that relationships persist when partners are satisfied within the relationship and benefit from it. Interdependence theory suggests that commitment is strengthened by the amount of satisfaction derived from the relationship, whereas it weakens when potential alternatives are perceived as better than the primary partner or when the partner prefers an alternative relationship status (being single). Rusbult (1980) forwarded the investment model that suggests that relationships not only persist due to the attractive forces that partners experience within the relationship (mutual satisfaction) or the absence of
alternatives to the primary relationship but also due to the mutual investments that bind partners together. In essence, commitment is influenced by three independent factors: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size.

Relationship commitment curbs the partner’s interest in an extradyadic relationship (Rusbult, Agnew, & Ximena, 2011). To support this, researchers have found that the frequency of friending romantic alternatives while in a relationship is related to lower relationship commitment (Drouin et al., 2014). These researchers also found that individuals with low commitment scores were keener in sending and accepting new friend requests with romantic interests. Further research suggested that merely thinking about potential alternatives in one’s social circle reduced relationship satisfaction and commitment (Drouin et al., 2015). Moreover, there is a growing body of research on back burner relationships, which shows that most individuals, whether they are single or in a committed relationship, maintain contact with potential relationship partners via technology (Dibble & Drouin, 2014; Dibble et al., 2015). However, researchers also found that neither communicating with potential partners lowered relationship commitment (Dibble & Drouin, 2014) nor did the total number of social media connections (Drouin et al., 2014). Interestingly, individuals tend to identify potential committed and sexual alternatives more readily from their SNSs friends’ list than than their memory (Drouin et al., 2015). In a study, researchers asked Facebook users to enumerate potential alternatives from either their Facebook friends’ list or their memory. Results revealed that individuals in the Facebook condition identified more alternatives, particularly sexual alternatives, than individuals in the memory recall condition.

Building on the previous research on SNSs, the purpose of the current study was to examine whether relationship status predicted variance in relationship satisfaction, infidelity-related behaviors, perception of online committed or sexual alternatives, quality of alternatives, SNSs addiction, and the total number of SNS accounts that participants had signed up for.

Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the independent variable was relationship status and the dependent variables were SNSs infidelity behaviors, SNSs addiction, relationship satisfaction, number of potential committed and sexual alternatives, and perception regarding the quality of available alternatives. Committed alternatives were operationalized as alternatives with whom an individual would like to potentially develop a committed relationship (if he/she was single). Similarly, sexual alternatives were operationalized as alternatives with whom an individual would like to potentially develop a sexual relationship (if he/she was single). The author hypothesized that the two groups (committed vs. dating) will show a significant difference in their relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 1) infidelity-related behaviors (Hypothesis 2), quality of alternatives (Hypothesis 3), SNSs addiction (Hypothesis 4), and the total number of SNS accounts (Hypothesis 5). Moreover, the author hypothesized that the dating group will report a higher number of both committed and sexual alternatives (Hypothesis 6a) when compared with the committed group who will have a significantly lower number of both types of alternatives (Hypothesis 6b). Finally, the author hypothesized that the committed group will report more committed alternatives (Hypothesis 7a) than sexual alternatives, and the dating group will report more sexual alternatives than committed alternatives (Hypothesis 7b).

Participants

The present study included 578 participants (378 females, 200 males) between the ages of 18 years and 82 years ($M = 29.15$, $SD = 12.04$). Participants included in the analyses were divided into two groups based on their relationship status: committed group ($n = 330$; married $= 39.4\%$), committed
= 17.6%) and dating group (n = 248). The sample was ethnically diverse: White (52.1%), Asian (21.8%), Hispanic (18.5%), African American (5.7%), Native American (1%), and other (0.9%). The education of participants ranged vastly: 0.50% did not complete high school, 14.9% of participants reported completing a high school diploma, 45.7% were in college, 9.0% completed an associate degree, 21.8% completed a bachelor’s degree, 1.4% were attending graduate school, and 6.7% completed a master’s degree. The participants mostly resided in the United States (89.6%).

Method

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A questionnaire was devised to assess the participants’ age, gender, ethnicity, education level, occupation, and relationship status.

Commitment Scale. The 7-item commitment subscale from the investment model was used to measure romantic relationship commitment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The scale is anchored on a 9-point Likert-type scale (0 = do not agree at all, 4 = agree somewhat, 8 = agree completely). Example items are “I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future” and “I want our relationship to last for a very long time.” Some items are reverse scored and averaged to get the total score. The reliability of the commitment Scale for this study was .77.

Modified Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire (FIQ). The modified FIQ scale was used to measure the behavioral addiction components related to SNSs use. FIQ is an eight-item scale developed by Elphinston and Noller (2011). For this purpose, the word “Facebook” was substituted with “social media.” Responses are based on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Example items are “I often think about social media when I am not using it” and “I feel connected to others when I use social media.” The responses were summed to get the total score. The reliability of the modified Facebook Intrusion Scale for this study was .81.

Alternatives assessment. The participants were given two hypothetical situations. They were asked to check their SNSs friends’ list and state the total number of potential committed and sexual alternatives whom they would consider developing a committed or sexual relationship with (respectively), if they were single.

Couple satisfaction index (CSI-4). In this study, CSI developed by Funk and Rogge (2007) was used to measure relationship satisfaction. CSI is a 4-item scale. The first statement is anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (0 = extremely unhappy, 6 = perfect). One statement is anchored on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0 = not at all true, 5 = completely true), and the remaining two are anchored on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all, 5 = completely). Example items are “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner” and “in general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” The responses were summed to get the total score, which ranged from 0 to 21. Higher scores indicated greater relationship satisfaction, while scores falling under 13.5 indicated considerable relationship dissatisfaction. Reliability of the CSI-4 scale for this study was .87.

Quality of alternatives facet and global items. The quality of relationship alternatives was measured using the 10-item quality of alternatives facet and global items subscale from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998). Response format is anchored on a 4-point Likert-type scale for the 5 facet (specific) items (A = don’t agree at all, D = agree completely) and a 9-point Likert-type scale for the 5 global (general) items (0 = do not agree at all, 8 = agree completely).
Responses were summed to get the total score. An example item is “My needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships”, “My alternatives to our relationship are close to ideal (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.)”.

Reliability of the quality of alternatives scale for this study was .85.

**Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB) Scale.** The SMIRB (a 7-item scale) was used (McDaniel et al., 2017) to measure social media infidelity behaviors. An example item is “if my spouse/partner asked me about my chats, comments, and messages to others on SNSs, there are some messages I would like to hide from him or her.” Participants rated their agreement on a 6-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Items were averaged to get an Internet infidelity behavior score. Higher scores represented greater tendency to engage in infidelity behaviors. Reliability of the SMIRB for this study was .86.

**Procedure**

An institutional review board at California state university (San Jose) approved the present study. The study included an anonymous online survey administered through the Survey-Monkey website. The survey link was shared on the approving university’s website, Facebook, Linkedin, WhatsApp, and Amazon Mechanical Turk. The link first directed participants to the consent form, which was followed by a battery of survey questions and hypothetical situations. Manipulation checks were included throughout the questionnaires to ensure that participants were actually reading and appropriately responding to the questions and also to confirm that humans, not robots, were taking the survey. The participants were not monetarily compensated for their participation by the author.

**Results**

Tables 1 and 2 show the means and standard deviations of the two groups along with their respective t values and significance levels. For analyses, the sample was divided according to the relationship status. The author combined those who reported to be married or committed to a partner in one group (n = 330) and those who reported to be in a casual dating relationship in the second group (n = 248). The relationship commitment level of the committed group was significantly higher than the dating group (p ≤ .001). An independent samples t test was conducted to compare the two groups based on the relationship status (committed vs. dating) and examined the between-group differences in the dependent variables, which are SNSs infidelity behaviors, relationship satisfaction, SNSs addiction, quality of alternatives, number of committed alternatives, number of sexual alternatives, and the total number of SNS accounts each participant had signed up for.

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**Table 1. Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), and t Values on the Study Variables Between Committed and Dating Groups.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Committed (n = 300)</th>
<th>Dating (n = 222)</th>
<th>t(520)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CI [LL, UL]</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNSs infidelity</td>
<td>2.23 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.29 (0.89)</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>.458</td>
<td>[-0.23, 0.10]</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of alternatives</td>
<td>26.24 (13.56)</td>
<td>29.25 (11.80)</td>
<td>-2.02</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>[-0.52, -0.36]</td>
<td>.234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 522. SNS = social networking site; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; LL = lower limit.
The results revealed that neither the between-group difference in relationship satisfaction was significantly different, \( t(576) = 1.67, p = .09 \), nor was there a significant between-group difference in the SNSs infidelity behaviors, \( t(520) = 0.74, p = .46 \). There was a significant between-group difference in the quality of alternatives, \( t(520) = 2.62, p < .01 \). Dating partners perceived better alternatives to their primary relationship. Moreover, there was also a significant between-group difference in the SNSs addiction scores, \( t(576) = 3.01, p < .01 \) such that dating partners reported higher SNSs addiction scores. The author did not find a significant between-group difference in the total numbers of SNSs, \( t(576) = 0.25, p = .80 \). Committed group had an average of five accounts (\( M = 5.23, SD = 2.37 \)) and dating group also had an average of five accounts (\( M = 5.18, SD = 2.18 \)). Furthermore, Pearson bivariate correlations also confirmed that relationship status was not related to the total number of SNS accounts (\( r = .06 \), albeit being significantly related to quality of sexual alternatives (\( r = .14** \)), number of sexual alternatives (\( r = .15** \)), and SNSs addiction scores (\( r = .12** \)).

Furthermore, the between-group difference in the number of committed alternatives was not significantly different, \( t(576) = -1.1, p = .23 \). In contrast, the between-group difference in the number of sexual alternatives was significant. Dating partners had significantly higher number of sexual alternatives than the committed group, \( t(576) = -2.64, p < .01 \). The within-group results revealed that the committed group reported significantly higher number of potential committed alternatives (\( M = 10.93, SD = 47.43 \)) than potential sexual alternatives (\( M = 8.37, SD = 27.05 \)). However, the dating group reported significantly higher potential sexual alternatives (\( M = 12.21, SD = 52.05 \)) than potential committed alternatives (\( M = 7.18, SD = 21.40 \)).

**Discussion**

Results revealed that scores on relationship satisfaction, SNSs infidelity-related behaviors, and the total number of SNSs accounts reported by the two groups (committed vs. dating) were not significantly different. However, there was a significant between-group difference in the quality of alternatives and SNSs addiction scores. Essentially, both groups had comparable relationship satisfaction scores, engaged in similar online infidelity-related behaviors, and even had equivalent number of SNS accounts. Interestingly, the dating group still reported higher SNS addiction scores and perceived better alternatives to their present relationship. The within-group analyses indicated that the committed group identified significantly greater potential committed partners than potential sexual partners. Whereas, the dating group identified significantly higher number of potential sexual partners than potential committed partners. It is intriguing that committed group showed more interest in alternatives with whom they would like to have a committed relationship rather than

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Committed ((n = 330))</th>
<th>Dating ((n = 248))</th>
<th>( t(576) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>95% CI [LL, UL]</th>
<th>Cohen’s ( d )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>19.30 4.07</td>
<td>18.70 4.46</td>
<td>1.67 .094</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−0.10, 1.30]</td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS addiction</td>
<td>27.08 9.32</td>
<td>29.39 8.27</td>
<td>−3.01 .002</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−3.77, −0.84]</td>
<td>.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of committed alternatives</td>
<td>1.22 0.74</td>
<td>1.29 0.62</td>
<td>−1.19 .233</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−0.18, 0.04]</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sexual alternatives</td>
<td>1.16 0.76</td>
<td>1.33 0.76</td>
<td>−2.64 .008</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−0.29, −0.04]</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SNS</td>
<td>5.23 2.37</td>
<td>5.18 2.18</td>
<td>0.25 .800</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−0.32, 0.43]</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. \( N = 578 \). SNS = social networking site; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; LL = lower limit.*

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sexual relationship. This may be because 99% of the committed sample was cohabiting and all of the
casually dating sample was non-cohabiting. Another reason could be that engaging in extradyadic
sexual relationship, while cohabiting, could have a stronger repercussion than engaging in committed
relationship.

Furthermore, the between group analyses revealed that the dating group reported more sexual
alternatives than the committed group. That is, the dating group recognized more SNSs friends who
could be considered as sexual partners. Whereas, the two groups did not differ in terms of the total
number of SNSs friends with whom they could potentially have a committed relationship. One
plausible explanation could be that because the committed group identified significantly lower
number of sexual alternatives and showed no difference in the number of committed alternatives,
relationship status may protect against interest in sexual alternatives but not against interest in
committed alternatives.

It is noteworthy that the dating group had significantly lower commitment levels than the
committed group. Theoretically, lower commitment could translate into perceiving better alterna-
tives and a tendency to make investments outside the primary relationship (Rusbult et al., 2011). The
dating group reported to have significantly lower commitment scores and greater number of sexual
alternatives. The dating group also reported to be in a non-cohabiting relationship, which may
increase their predisposition to making more investments with SNSs friends (investment model),
albeit showing no significant difference in their infidelity-related behaviors or relationship satisfac-
tion. The author cannot determine causality from this study. It is like the chicken-and egg-problem.
It may be that SNSs addiction leads to lower commitment or vice versa. However, because there was
no significant differences in the relationship satisfaction scores, the author proposes that lower
commitment may come first. Previously, researchers have found that SNS users engage in romantic
communication with online friends even when they are committed to a primary partner (Drouin
et al., 2014, 2015). The author contends that due to lower commitment, the dating group perceived
better alternatives outside their primary relationship, which may be one of the reasons that can
explain the dating group’s higher SNSs addiction scores.

**Limitation**

The results of the present study should be generalized with caution. These results are limited in scope
and interpretation should be done keeping in view the limitations of the study. This study is a single
method study (self-report) using cross-sectional data. Self-report data are more subjective than
objective, which is one of the limitations of this study. Moreover, the environment (time of the
day, stress level, and whether taken alone or in the presence of the partner or others) was not
controlled. The difference in environment could have confounded the present findings. Despite
these limitations, the present study is a step forward in SNSs research showing how relationship
status may be connected to quality of alternatives, number of sexual alternatives, and SNSs addic-
tion, albeit showing no connection with relationship satisfaction, online infidelity behaviors, and the
total number of SNS accounts.

**Author’s Note**

The data used for this study can be requested by e-mailing the author at irum.abbasi@gmail.com

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