



Relationship Stress: Social Media Edition

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Purpose

The purpose of the study is to examine whether social media use by one's significant other is as big a stressor in romantic relationships as the traditional sources of stress that affect the quality & sustainability of romantic relationships (e.g. work/family conflict, children, family/friends, etc).

Rationale

Couples involved in romantic relationships (dating, engaged, married) face a variety of stressors that can determine the quality and sustainability of the relationship. These stressors can include money, children (or the decision about having children), work schedules that create work/family conflict, and opinions of family and friends about the relationship or one's significant other. With the arrival of the Internet, a new source of stress has emerged with the potential to affect the quality and sustainability of romantic relationships. The new source of stress is the use of social media by one's significant other. Altschule (2015) found social media use negatively impacts a romantic relationship when one's significant other is always on social media, engages in inappropriate activity online, or is overly private when online (i.e. hiding online activity from their partner). Bea (2012) found that having a significant other who shares too much information about the relationship online, maintains contact with an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend (e.g. tagging, messaging, accepting a friend request), or who suspiciously monitors the online activity of his/her significant other can negatively affect a romantic relationship. Fritz (2015) found sending tweets to friends or followers of the opposite sex or simply having large numbers of followers of the opposite sex can create a source of stress within a romantic relationship. Finally, Huston (2014) found simply being online using social media creates opportunities for one's significant other to reconnect with ex-boyfriends, girlfriends, or admirers which does not allow for complete closure on prior relationships. This lack of complete closure has come to be known as a "soft breakup." The present study will examine the extent to which social media use by one's significant other is a significant source of stress in romantic relationships among college students.

Method

Participants

To participate in the study, participants were required to be 18 years of age, in a romantic relationship, and a member of the Marshall University Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool (SONA).

Procedure

Participants first read the Anonymous Survey Consent form and were instructed to print a copy for their personal records. The survey participants were asked to complete was divided up into four parts. In Part A of the survey, participants were asked to provide demographic information (e.g. gender, age, sexual orientation, length of longest relationship, current relationship status). In Part B, participants were asked to provide responses to 24 questions that assessed the extent to which various sources of stress were present in their current relationship with their significant other using a 5-point rating scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). In Part C, participants were asked to provide responses to 4 questions that assessed their current use of social media. Finally, in Part D, participants were asked to provide responses to 6 items that assessed their current emotional state and their current relationship with their significant other.

Results

Individual Relationship Stress Scales that Predict "Happiness in Current Relationship"

Model	Variables Entered
1	Social Media Trust Stress, Work and School Stress, Financial Stress, Social Media Activity Stress, Family and Friend Stress DV = Happiness in My Current Relationship

Model	R	R Square
1	.832	.691

Model		df	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5	31.373	.000
	Residual	70		
	Total	75		

Model		t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	22.355	.000
	Financial Stress	-1.889	.063
	Family and Friend Stress	-2.039	.045
	Work and School Stress	-3.078	.003
	Social Media Activity Stress	-.718	.475
	Social Media Trust Stress	-2.569	.012

Result:

Family & Friend Stress, Work & School Stress, and Social Media Trust Stress emerged as significant predictors for the question "How happy are you in your current relationship" for the sample of n =76 college students

Individual Relationship Stress Scales that Predict "Relationship is Biggest Source of Stress"

Model	Variables Entered
1	Social Media Trust Stress, Work and School Stress, Financial Stress, Social Media Activity Stress, Family and Friend Stress DV = Relationship is the Single Biggest Source of Stress in Life

Model	R	R Square
1	.772	.596

Model		df	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5	20.620	.000
	Residual	70		
	Total	75		

Model		t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-2.204	.031
	Financial Stress	1.358	.179
	Family and Friend Stress	1.050	.297
	Work and School Stress	3.396	.001
	Social Media Activity Stress	-.235	.815
	Social Media Trust Stress	2.845	.006

Result:

Work & School Stress and Social Media Trust Stress emerged as significant predictors for the question "Is your current relationship the single largest stressor in your life" for the sample of n =76 college students

Conclusions

- Based on regression analysis, there is an indication that as Social Media Trust Stress increases, ratings for "Happiness in Current Relationship" decrease
- Based on regression analysis, there is an indication that as Social Media Trust Stress increases, ratings for "Relationship is Biggest Source of Stress" increase
- Results indicate Social Media Trust is an apparent stressor in romantic relationships in participants

Strengths/Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Length of survey was appropriate for given purpose
- Stress scales used were fairly good predictors of "Happiness in a Relationship", "Long-Term Success of Relationship", and "Relationship is Biggest Source of Stress"
- Analyzed variety of stress factors to use in comparison to stress related to social media

Weaknesses:

- Unequal amount of female participants compared to male participants
- Stress scales used were not good predictors of "Anxiousness" or "Depression"
- Sample size comparatively small in regards to campus population
- Uneven distribution of sexual identity in demographics (Majority of participants identified as heterosexual)

References

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