Social Networking Site Facebook's Negative Impact on Romantic Relationships Through

Encouraging Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance

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Abstract

This paper explores the negative impact that the social networking site (SNS) Facebook

is having on romantic relationships through encouraging interpersonal electronic

surveillance (IES) online. Examined throughout this paper is the heavy involvement that

SNSs are playing in romantic relationships, whether it be building new relationships or

maintaining pre-existing relationships. This paper discusses the contributions of jealous,

anxious or attaching personality traits and how these can provoke relationship jealousy.

This paper also discusses how jealousy within a relationship can lead to individuals

conducting online surveillance of their romantic partner. The paper examines how

relationships are being managed online and how SNSs are being used as a tool to

maintain both online and offline relationships. It is also discussed in this paper the impact

that IES can have post relationship and how individuals continue to monitor an ex-

partners profile once they are no longer romantically involved with one another.

Keywords: social networking sites, social media, interpersonal electronic communication,

dating, online dating, communities/networks.

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Social Networking Sites are becoming increasingly popular not only to create and develop new interpersonal relationships, but they are also commonly used to maintain existing relationships. SNSs have also presented a new platform for surveillance within romantic relationships. Tokunaga (2010, p. 705) argues that "SNSs have been reinvented into a tool for interpersonal surveillance along with their social networking capabilities", this is an important theory to keep in mind when considering the growth of SNSs and the hierarchy that they play in romantic relationships and in online dating communities and networks. Whilst adults are still able to function without having their romantic partner right next to them, it is the emotional availability and support aspects that many expect from a romantic partner that remains a concern due to the increased use of social media and SNSs in romantic partnerships (Morey et al., 2013). This paper discusses how the online social media site Facebook has negatively impacted relationship trust by encouraging IES. The articles referenced throughout this paper will strengthen this argument by discussing how romantic relationships have been influenced by IES, what individual personalities are more likely to participate in the online surveillance of their partner and the effects that this surveillance is having on relationships and individuals even once the relationship has concluded.

Discussion

Online Relationships. Social networking sites, particularly Facebook, play an important role in the maintenance of existing online and offline romantic relationships. It has been discussed how "research has convincingly shown that SNSs are important in

the emergence and maintenance of romantic relationships even though this may not be apparent from an individual's perspective" (Neyer & Voigt, 2004, p. 282), which is an interesting point of discussion considering that majority of people use social media for reasons other than dating and romantic relationships and are becoming unaware that the emergence and maintenance of their romantic relationship, in fact, relies heavily on social media and SNSs. Social networking sites can make or break relationships; they give both a platform for individuals to find information about potential romantic partners such as hobbies and interests (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016), but also give the individuals the platform to obsess over and observe the online actions of others. Van Ouytsel et al. (2016) discuss in their article the popularity of initiating a relationship online through social networking platforms such as Facebook, with 47% of the 18-24-year-old age group surveyed admitting to using the internet and social networking sites for romantic advances.

The growth and success of Facebook has created a solid platform for SNSs and its users around the world and over the years with "Facebook becoming the most successful single platform with more than one billion users worldwide" (Fox & Warber, 2014, p. 3) which shows just how dedicated users are to social media. By signing up to Facebook and creating a personal profile, romantic partners can send personal messages through the platform, can post directly to their partner's profile publically, view photographs, investigate timeline history, and can even search through their partner's online friends list (Fox & Warber, 2014). SNSs provide romantic partners with all they need to know about their loved one and provide users with the confidence to engage in new romantic relationships and maintain existing relationships through a social networking platform.

However, there are numerous issues that can stem from individuals using Facebook as a means of communication and security within their romantic relationship.

   Online Relationship Jealousy. Online social networking has been demonstrated to impact people's romantic relationships in multiple ways. For example, "research documenting the negative impacts that social networking can have on romantic relationships by spurring jealousy, especially amongst individuals with anxious attachment styles" (Carpenter & Spottswood, 2013, p. 1531) illustrates the effects of social media and how it fuels jealousy in romantic relationships. Jealousy is a common feeling that is often experienced in romantic relationships and is especially prevalent in relationships between individuals who experience anxious or attaching personality traits. "With 950 million active Facebook members logging into their accounts daily" (LeFebvre et al., 2014, p. 79) there is no doubt that individuals are going to experience some uncertainty when it comes to their partner being active in online social networking environments such as Facebook. The frequent use of Facebook by an individual in a romantic relationship has had proven connections to some forms of jealousy (LeFebvre et al., 2014). The use of Facebook by relational partners has also been related back to Facebook-related jealousy which can be demonstrated through acts as simple as becoming jealous of a partner sending a friend request to the opposite sex (LeFebvre et al., 2014). Elphinston and Noller (as cited in LeFebvre et al., 2014, p. 80) argue that "determined cognitive jealousy and surveillance behaviours are linked to relationship dissatisfaction" this is a valid argument and puts forward the insinuation that online social networking use within romantic relationships influences the quality and outcome of the relationship.

It is the feeling of jealousy that seemingly drives those in romantic relationships to feel the need to dig further into their romantic partners' social networking lives and online media profiles for more information on what they are doing, who they are engaging with and what they are engaging in online. This leads to uncertainty and trust issues within the relationship, "relational uncertainty stems from perceptions of ambiguity within the relationship, such as not knowing if the partner is serious about the relationship or if the relationship has a future" (Fox & Warber, 2014, p. 4). In other words, relational uncertainty in a relationship is often the cause for individuals in relationships to participate in jealous online behaviours such as IES. It is extremely normal for "the partner experiencing uncertainty to explore the content on their partner's profile to determine what their partner is doing and who they are interacting with so that they can alleviate any uncertainty they may have about their partner and the relationship" (Fox & Warber, 2014, p.4) on the other hand, looking through a partner's profile can also confirm any suspicions being had. Significantly, relationship surveillance through social networking sites such as Facebook is often seen as a tool of control and has also been referred to as the term Little Brother.

Little Brother is described as the occurrence in which individuals on the internet engage in surveillance through social networking sites to gain further awareness about the online behaviours and actions of others (Tokunaga, 2010). Today where online social networking is the norm, participation on social networking sites has become one of the most important ways to stay a fundamental part in a partner's daily life (Tokunaga, 2010), which is considerably concerning. When we consider being in a romantic relationship or partnership with someone we do not presume that this means staying

furthermore in touch with their social networking lives and profiles than reality itself and the physical and emotional sensations of a relationship. It is not uncommon for individuals to not realize that they are participating in IES as "surveillance can be as simple as an individual casually examining their romantic partner's profile to gather the simplest information" (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 706). As this suggests, IES whether it is intentional or not can have a negative impact on a couple's relationship.

Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance. Interpersonal electronic surveillance can impact romantic relationships in numerous ways. Le et al. (as cited by Sinclair et al., 2015, p. 78) state that in fact "analysis has shown that perceived social network approval is a consistent, negative predictor of relationship termination" which is an interesting argument and shows the impact that SNSs have on approval within romantic relationships online. Online social media profile analysis is otherwise known as IES, which is characterized as "surreptitious strategies individuals use over communication technologies to gain awareness of another user's offline and/or online behaviours" (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 706). IES is an interesting concept and is very real in many romantic relationships where partners are regularly using social media platforms and SNSs to communicate with others outside of the relationship. The use of SNSs can provoke jealousy and surveillance which often leads to trust being broken within a romantic relationship, one individual may feel that their privacy has been invaded by their partner. Online social networking, in general, has affected the way in which we communicate with our romantic partners. Instead of face-to-face communication in relationships, couples are now turning to media and SNSs to communicate with their romantic partners; the internet specifically is changing relational communication, which is altering the

quality of the communication within their relationship. IES, however, can develop further than just consistently observing a partner's Facebook profile. Helsper and Whitty (as cited in Utz & Beukeboom, 2010, p. 514) report that "in about 30% of married couples at least one partner has at least once secretly read the e-mails of SMS text messages of the other partner" however, reading a partner's emails or SMS messages is ultimately a breach of trust within a romantic relationship and is still a form of IES even though it is not conducted through social media or SNSs.

There are many different reasons for which individuals may feel the need to conduct surveillance of their partner in a romantic relationship. The first is suspicious jealousy, which can arise when a romantic partner may feel threatened by an external source whilst in a relationship (Tokunaga, 2010). The second is that individuals who have previously experienced a break of trust or infidelity with their romantic partner feel some uncertainty within their relationship and feel the need to observe their partners' social networking profiles (Tokunaga, 2010). Interpersonal electronic surveillance can continue even after a relationship has ended with many individuals continuing to observe their ex-partner's profiles.

Post-Relationship Surveillance. If it were not for online social networking and social media, after a break-up, many couples would have no option but to go their separate ways and would most likely not hear from or need to see their ex-partner again. But due to most individuals having online Facebook profiles along with other social networking profiles, it has become increasingly easier for people to stay in touch with one another.

It has also become increasingly easier for individuals to keep an eye on what their ex-partner is doing and who they are communicating with both online and offline. Furthermore, "when romantic relationships dissolve, people can retain access to an ex-partners status updates and pictures by remaining friends or through shared friends or information that is publically available" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, p. 78) this is concerning when considering the lack of privacy and security that SNSs often don't provide. With Facebook allowing the upload of status updates and pictures, other users still have a clear view of what is occurring in a person's life events, even if they are no longer romantically connected (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). Interestingly, "almost a quarter of American adult social networking site users have admitted to searching online for information about someone they had dated in the past" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, p. 78) which many would consider seemingly unnecessary and inappropriate considering the romantic relationship has already ended. It is compelling to consider that even once a romantic relationship has ended that individuals can still watch what their ex-partners are doing. Whether an individual chooses to observe their ex-partners Facebook profile depends entirely on the individual themselves and the circumstances in which the relationship ended. There are many relationships that end and with that communication and online friendship is also cut off, and whilst this is the case for some it is not uncommon for "individuals who did not terminate the relationship themselves to search for information about their ex-partner rather than those who have initiated the breakup themselves" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, p. 78).

Often, social networking usage after a breakup can turn nasty, unreasonable and sometimes obsessive. IES is not the only way that ex-partners can keep in contact

through social networking post-breakup (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). Individuals can post

on their personal profiles after a breakup to try and catch the attention of their ex-partner

or someone who may be in contact with their ex-partner. There are three main ways that

ex-partners can disturb each other through social networking; covert provocation, public

harassment and venting (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). Covert provocation can be simple

things such as posting song lyric or poetry lines within status updates in reference to their

ex-partner (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). However, "these messages can be used to hurt the

ex-partner or to communicate with the intention to get back together" (Van Ouytsel et al.,

2016, p. 78) which often ends up having a negative effect on both the ex-partner and the

individual committing the act. Public harassment activities, on the other hand, are less

frequent and can include things such as "changing one's relationship status from "in a

relationship" with the intent to make the ex-partner jealous or posting embarrassing

pictures of the ex-partner to humiliate them" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, p. 78) however,

public harassment activities can also lead to a more damaging outcome. The third process

of online social media disturbance is venting which includes "writing negative comments

about the ex-partner and posting mean-spirited or hateful comments in a response to

pictures of an ex-partner" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016, p. 78) which is more commonly seen

between young adults on social media today and majority of people have fallen victim to

venting. Personality traits can also influence social media usage after breakups. Fox and

Warber (2014, p. 2) discuss how "attachment styles influence reactions to breakups and

that those with anxious attachment styles often have a longer recovery period and may

continue to seek information about their partner after the breakup." Fox and Warber

(2014) conclude that their findings have proven that anxious attachment can cause further

distress and frequent partner monitoring post-breakup. Overall, SNSs and IES can continue to impact a relationship even once it has concluded.

Conclusion

The popularity of social networking sites being used within relationships as a tool to both create new, and develop on, existing romantic relationships is becoming an increasing issue within social media platforms and SNSs which negatively impacts romantic relationships and breaks the trust between romantic partners. Social networking sites have also amplified the issue of surveillance within relationships particularly interpersonal electronic surveillance. The online social networking site Facebook has negatively impacted romantic relationships by encouraging interpersonal electronic surveillance. Surveillance within romantic relationships has been identified throughout this paper in relation to personality traits and jealousy issues being the leading causes when it comes to individuals observing their partner's online profiles. Trust has also been identified as a contributor to interpersonal electronic surveillance. The impact that online surveillance has on relationships is negative and has affected the way that people may feel in a relationship or may treat their partner in a relationship. It was also discussed how surveillance of social networking profiles can continue even after the relationship has ended. There are many contributing factors into why individuals choose to observe their romantic partner's social networking profiles but overall conducting surveillance of a partner's Facebook profile is both an invasion of privacy and a violation of trust. Arguably, without the ability to survey a partner's social networking profile, romantic relationships would work differently and would not be so negatively impacted by social media usage.

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