

**The Association Between Social Media Use and Romantic Relationship Outcomes:
A Scoping Review**

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Abstract

Introduction: As social media usage rapidly increases worldwide, its influence on romantic relationships has drawn significant research interest. While social media enhances communication between partners, it also introduces risks like intrusion and surveillance, which can decrease relationship satisfaction, provoke jealousy, and increase conflict. This scoping review synthesizes recent literature to clarify how specific social media behaviours interact with romantic relationship outcomes and to identify key mediating and moderating factors that shape these effects. **Methods:** Following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, a scoping review was conducted across three databases (Scopus, PsycINFO, Web of Science). Articles were screened for relevance in Covidence based on established inclusion criteria. Information was extracted regarding study characteristics, sample characteristics, social media platforms, usage behaviours, relational outcomes, and mediators and moderators. **Results:** Fourteen studies met the inclusion criteria, most using cross-sectional designs and focusing on relationship maintenance. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook were commonly examined, with intrusion being the most studied usage behaviour. Relational outcomes, grouped into relational, individual, and behavioural factors, included satisfaction, commitment, well-being, conflicts, negative outcomes, marital disaffection, and digital dating abuse. Mediators and moderators were similarly categorized into individual, relational, and behavioural factors. **Discussion:** The findings highlight that whether relational outcomes are positive or negative depends on how individuals use these platforms and the mediating and moderating factors involved. However, the results for relational outcomes, as well as for mediators and moderators, were fragmented, making it challenging to draw specific, consistent conclusions. Given the continuous evolution of social media, ongoing research is essential to address its dynamic influence on romantic relationships and relational well-being.

Keywords: Social media use, romantic relationships, mediators, moderators

Introduction

Over the past decade, social media platforms have seen an extensive rise in usage, with approximately five billion active social media users globally (Statista, 2024b). As of 2024, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok are the most popular, with the average person spending about 143 minutes per day on these platforms (Statista, 2024a). Social media can be defined as internet-based platforms facilitating ongoing and lasting communication, enabling users to interact and share user-generated content, including text, images, videos, blogs, and social networking sites (SNS) (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Specifically, SNS are a type of social media that focuses on building and maintaining personal and professional relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In romantic relationships, social media has become increasingly important for facilitating communication, enabling partners to stay connected, share experiences, and express affection (Cui et al., 2016; Krueger & Forest, 2020). Effective communication through these platforms is often considered important for relationship quality. High-quality relationships are linked to greater happiness, resilience, and mental health, while poor-quality can diminish these aspects (Andrews et al., 2017; Gómez-López et al., 2019; Kansky, 2018; Londero-Santos et al., 2021).

Given the increasing role of social media in relational communication, understanding its overall impact on relational outcomes is crucial. Although research has extensively explored the association between social media use and romantic relationships, some studies place less emphasis on the influence of specific social media usage behaviours or the role of key mediating and moderating factors (Coundouris et al., 2021; Kwok & Wescott, 2020). This narrow approach limits a comprehensive understanding of how social media use is related to a broader range of relational outcomes. By synthesizing recent literature, this study aims to provide a more integrated perspective on these dynamics and identify factors that determine whether social media use positively or negatively affects romantic relationships.

Social media use and romantic relationships

To understand the role of social media in romantic relationships, usage behaviours on social media can be categorized into four categories: positive relationship-focused behaviours (PRFB), intrusion, surveillance, and pursuing alternatives (Coundouris et al., 2021). These behaviours relate to romantic relationships throughout different romantic relationship stages, including formation, maintenance, and dissolution (Brody et al., 2020; Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022; Whiteside et al., 2018).

PRFB include actions that affirm or reinforce the relationship, such as displaying a visible and accurate relationship status, uploading couple photos, sending private messages, tagging or posting about the partner, and liking or commenting on the partner's content (Coundouris et al., 2021). Several studies found that making relationships visible on social media by sharing information about the relationship is linked to healthier relationships, higher satisfaction, and stronger commitment (Emery et al., 2015; Seidman et al., 2019; Sosik & Bazarova, 2014). For instance, sharing their relationship status with family, friends, and acquaintances is often viewed as a significant milestone (Fox et al., 2014; Ito et al., 2021; Papp et al., 2012). Moreover, Saslow et al. (2013) found that posting photographs with one's romantic partner as a profile picture correlates with increased satisfaction in the relationship. Conversely, frequently taking and posting individual photos can negatively impact perceived quality in romantic relationships, with factors like jealousy and self-idealization playing a mediating role (Halpern et al., 2017). Furthermore, social media provides fast and easy communication, fostering connections and supporting relationship maintenance, particularly for long-distance couples (Billedo et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2014; Ledbetter, 2014; Lenhart & Duggan, 2014).

In addition to examining positive usage behaviours, research has also investigated negative behaviours, namely intrusion, surveillance, and pursuing alternatives. Intrusion

occurs when social media use becomes so embedded in daily routines that it disrupts romantic relationships (Coundouris et al., 2021). Excessive time on these platforms, even to the point of addiction, often shifts attention away from direct interactions with partners, potentially harming the relationship. For example, Nongpong and Charoensukmongkol (2016) found that individuals who perceived their partners as overusing social media reported feeling neglected, lonely, and jealous, with this perceived lack of caring strongly linked to intentions to break up. Similarly, Elphinston and Noller (2011) highlighted that high levels of Facebook intrusion can contribute to relational dissatisfaction and conflict. Next, surveillance involves monitoring a partner's online profile and interactions, such as comments and likes (Coundouris et al., 2021). During the formation stage, social media facilitates flirting and gathering information on potential partners, including their hobbies, interests, and social circles, which can be seen as an early form of monitoring (Fox et al., 2013; Meenagh, 2015; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). In the maintenance stage, monitoring interactions like comments or likes from unknown individuals and having constant access to a partner's activities can provoke jealousy and lead to surveillance of the romantic partner via social media (Fox et al., 2014; Muise et al., 2009; Tandon et al., 2021; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Commitment appears to mediate the degree and nature of social media surveillance, influencing whether individuals are more or less likely to monitor a partner (Stanley et al., 2010). After a break-up, the dissolution phase, individuals often monitor their ex-partner's online activities, such as status updates, photos, and interactions with mutual friends, complicating the process of moving on (Fox et al., 2013). Social media also serves as a platform to express emotions and thoughts related to the break-up. Lastly, pursuing alternatives includes actions like sending or accepting friend requests from potential romantic interests, flirting, or maintaining secret contact with others through social media (Coundouris et al., 2021). For example, McDaniel et al. (2017) found that social media behaviours linked to pursuing alternatives were

significantly associated with lower relationship satisfaction, higher relationship ambivalence, and increased attachment avoidance. Similarly, Drouin et al. (2014) found that partners with lower commitment are more prone to engage with romantic interests by sending and accepting "friend" requests, with Facebook jealousy mediating this behaviour. Overall, the diverse associations between social media usage behaviours and romantic relationships underscore the complexity of their influence, warranting further exploration through comprehensive analyses and reviews.

Two systematic reviews have addressed the association between SNS use and romantic relationships, providing relevant insights into this topic. Rus and Tiemensma (2017) explored the broader association between SNS and romantic relationships. They categorized characteristics into those enabled or enhanced by SNS, such as adult attachment styles, relationship satisfaction, commitment, partner identity, and relationship maintenance, and those likely created by SNS, like partner surveillance and SNS-induced jealousy. The study faced challenges in synthesizing findings due to the wide range of topics and the absence of standardized measures. This made it difficult to draw clear conclusions. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Coundouris et al. (2021) specifically explored the relationship between SNS use and relationship quality. The findings revealed both positive and negative effects, depending on the specific type of SNS behaviour. The study also underscored the complexity of this relationship by highlighting the significant roles of individual differences and relationship variables, emphasizing the need for future research to explore mediating and moderating factors that influence the link between SNS use and relationship quality.

Current Study

Romantic relationships are central to overall health and well-being, making it essential to understand the factors that influence their quality (Andrews et al., 2017; Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Gómez-López et al., 2019; Kansky, 2018; Londero-Santos et al., 2021).

Social media, with its growing integration into daily life, offers opportunities to enhance these relationships but also introduces risks that may jeopardize them. While prior research has explored social media use and its effects on romantic relationships, no comprehensive overview synthesizes these findings concerning specific social media usage behaviours and the mediating and moderating factors involved. An overview is important to better understand how different social media usage behaviours affect romantic relationships and to provide insights into the factors that shape the strength and direction of these effects. This nuanced understanding provides valuable insights into the underlying dynamics and is vital for designing targeted interventions to mitigate risks and foster healthier relationship dynamics. Rapid technological advancements have significantly reshaped the social media landscape, highlighting the need for updated research on their impact on romantic relationships. Earlier systematic reviews predominantly focused on platforms like Facebook, which were central to initial studies on social media and relationships (Coundouris et al., 2021; Rus & Tiemensma, 2017). However, the rise of newer platforms like TikTok, alongside features such as Instagram Reels, introduces distinct interaction patterns that can uniquely influence romantic relationships and call for further investigation. TikTok, for instance, emphasizes video sharing and content creation, enabling users to engage with their romantic partners through shared videos, co-created content, and partner-generated posts (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Similarly, Instagram's Reels feature allows couples to create joint content or tag one another in videos. While these videos may enhance connection, they also present risks, such as jealousy from interactions with external audiences or unrealistic comparisons to idealized relationships portrayed online (Langlais et al., 2024).

This scoping review aims to synthesize existing research on the association between social media use and romantic relationship outcomes, with a particular focus on specific usage behaviours and key influencing factors. By addressing gaps in current knowledge, it

lays the groundwork for future research and the development of practical strategies to improve relational outcomes, ultimately supporting broader health and well-being. Specifically, it seeks to answer the research question: “*How is social media use related to relationship outcomes, and which mediating and moderating factors influence this relationship?*”.

Methods

Study Design

To address the research question, a scoping review was conducted. This type of review can be defined as a preliminary assessment of the potential size and scope of available research literature, aiming to identify the nature and extent of evidence (Grant & Booth, 2009). The aim is to map key concepts, identify research gaps, and provide an overall understanding of the current knowledge in the field (Grant & Booth, 2009). This scoping review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines, ensuring a systematic and transparent approach (Tricco et al., 2016).

Search Strategy

The literature search for this scoping review was conducted from June to July 2024. To identify relevant literature, the following three databases were selected: Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. The use of multiple databases increased the likelihood of identifying literature from diverse perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive inclusion of relevant studies. These databases were chosen for their extensive coverage of social and psychological research. PsycINFO is particularly focused on psychological and mental health studies, while Scopus and Web of Science provide a broad range of scientific literature across various disciplines, ensuring a wide array of academic articles (van Lotringen et al., 2021). To achieve an extensive literature search for this review, essential keywords related to

“*relationship*”, “*social media*”, and “*relationship outcome*” were determined and combined with Boolean operators (AND, OR), establishing an effective and comprehensive search strategy. Various synonyms and related terms were generated, including alternative phrases, as well as broader and narrower terms. The search strategy was then tested and refined to maximize the relevance and number of search results. The detailed search terms and their organization are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Used Search String in Databases

Databases	Search String
Scopus, PsycINFO and Web of Science	("romantic relation*" OR "couples" OR "dating" OR "married") AND ("social media" OR "social network sites" OR "online social networking" OR "SNS" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR "WhatsApp" OR "Instagram" OR "TikTok") AND ("relationship satisfaction" OR "jealousy" OR "relationship conflict" OR "relationship quality" OR "relationship maintenance" OR "relationship commitment" OR "romantic alternatives" OR "relationship happiness")

Eligibility Criteria

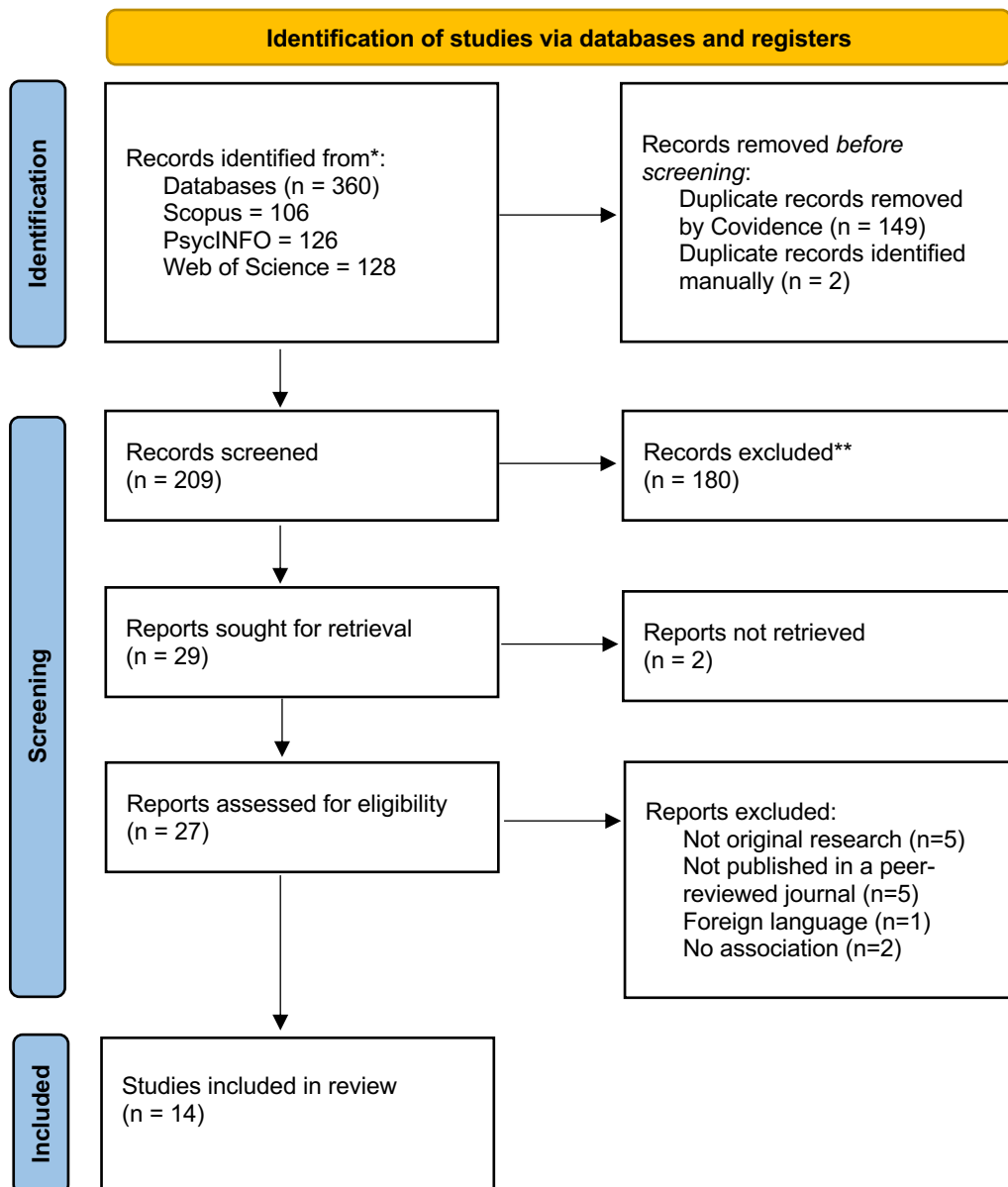
Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the screening process to maintain the relevance and quality of the studies included. The primary criteria for study inclusion were as follows: (a) the article must be original research examining the association between social media use and romantic relationships; (b) the article must be written in English or Dutch; (c) the article must be available or accessible in full text; (d) the article must be published in a peer-reviewed journal; (e) the article must investigate the association between social media use and specific aspects of romantic relationships, such as satisfaction, conflict, or happiness, as identified by the key terms used in this review; and (f) the article must be published in 2019 or later. The two existing systematic reviews by Rus

and Tiemensma (2017) and Coundouris et al. (2021) primarily included studies that focused on Facebook and were conducted mainly before 2019. Since then, social media use has expanded significantly across multiple platforms, with TikTok alone experiencing a 38% increase in monthly active users (Statista, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further drove social media use, as lockdowns heightened the need for online connection (Moore & March, 2022). Therefore, this scoping review aims to update the literature by focusing on the most recent findings from the past five years, ensuring relevance and currency (Bolderston, 2008). Consequently, older studies may not accurately represent the current impacts of social media on romantic relationships.

Study Selection

The study selection was conducted by one researcher, namely the author, due to the context of a Master's thesis. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) presents the search literature and the screening process (Moher et al., 2009). The database search using Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science yielded a total of 360 articles. The articles were exported from the databases into the online software "Covidence". In Covidence, 149 duplicates were removed automatically, with an additional two duplicates identified manually. Following this, studies published before 2019 were excluded. Then, the title and abstracts of the 209 articles were screened for relevance, leaving 29 articles. Next, the remaining articles were searched for and downloaded from Google Scholar for full-text review, where their methods, results, and discussion sections were evaluated against eligibility criteria. In the end, 14 studies met the criteria and were included in the current study.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process**Data Extraction and Synthesis**

Relevant data were extracted from the included articles, focusing on both study characteristics and sample characteristics. Study characteristics included authors, publication year, country, study aim, study design, and sample size. Sample characteristics covered gender, age, and sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual vs. non-heterosexual). Specific social media platforms studied were identified and mapped. Data on social media usage behaviours

(PRFB, surveillance, intrusion, and pursuing alternatives), relational outcomes, and mediating and moderating factors were categorized, along with the measurement tools used. Key findings on the association between social media use and relational outcomes were extracted and documented.

Results

A total of 14 studies were included in the current scoping review, see Table 2. Notably, four of these studies contained more than one study, each of which was analysed separately.

Table 2*Literature Synthesis for Associations Between Social Media Use and Romantic Relationship Outcomes*

	Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
1	Abbasi et al. (2019)	USA	$n = 138$ heterosexual individuals; female ($n = 95$, male $n = 43$); $M_{age} = 36.54$; $RS = 100\%$ married;	Cross-sectional survey examining the association between FB addiction and marital disaffection, with relationship commitment as moderator.	FB	Intrusion, FIQ (Elphinston & Noller, 2011)	Marital Disaffection, MDS (Kayser, 1996)	Moderators: Commitment, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	FB addiction is positively associated with marital disaffection, moderated by commitment.
2	Arikewuyo et al. (2021)	Nigeria	$n = 25$ romantic partners; 48% female, 52% male; age range = 28-52; $RS = 100\%$ married	Qualitative research design examining how the frequency of using multiple social media platforms affects romantic relationships.	Various social media platforms	Intrusion, in-depth interview questions	Relationship Satisfaction, in-depth interview questions	Mediators: Love and attraction, communication, jealousy, infidelity, partner monitoring, distraction, in-depth interview questions	Multiplex social media can enhance relationship satisfaction when partners show love and attraction and communicate through these platforms. However, it can also cause issues like jealousy, infidelity, partner monitoring, and distraction, leading to dissatisfaction.
3	Arikewuyo et al. (2022)	Nigeria	$n = 373$ undergraduate students; 59.2% female, 40.8% male; age range = 18-35; $RS = 100\%$ current	Cross-sectional survey examining the effects of social media use on conflict in romantic relationships through the mediating variables of jealousy, infidelity, and monitoring.	Various social media platforms	Social media use in general, 9-items measuring social media use	Conflicts, 6 items measuring conflicts in romantic relationships	Mediators: Jealousy, 27 items measuring jealousy; Monitoring, 15 items measuring monitoring; Infidelity, 14 items measuring infidelity	Social media use is linked to conflict in romantic relationships, with jealousy, infidelity, and partner monitoring as key mediators. However, social media alone does not predict infidelity.

Table 2 (Continued)

Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
4 Bouffard et al. (2022)	USA	<i>n</i> = 234 college students accessing IG; female (<i>n</i> = 181), male (<i>n</i> = 53); <i>M_{age}</i> = 20; RS = 100% current	Cross-sectional survey examining the impact of excessive IG use on relationship quality and addiction via mediated pathways.	IG	Intrusion, self-report of IG use and logged time on IG	Conflicts, 6 items measuring FB-related conflicts adapted to IG-related conflicts; Negative Relationship Outcomes, Adapted Clayton et al. (2013)'s three-question survey	Mediators: Relationship Satisfaction; CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007)	Prolonged IG use reduces relationship satisfaction, which then elevates conflicts and induces negative outcomes. Willingness to sacrifice improves satisfaction, reducing conflicts and negative outcomes. When satisfaction is low and conflicts over IG use are high, increased use may lead to addiction.
5 Delle et al. (2022)	USA	<i>n</i> = 211; female (<i>n</i> = 158), male (<i>n</i> = 61); <i>M_{age}</i> = 21.01; RS = 100% current/past relationship; RO = 89% straight, 2% bisexual, 4% gay, 1% lesbian, 0.5% queer, 0.5% pansexual, 0.5% same-gender loving, 1% asexual	Cross-sectional survey examining the association between active FB, Twitter, and IG use and relationship stress and satisfaction.	FB, IG, Twitter	Intrusion, adapted PAUM (Gerson et al., 2017)	Relationship Satisfaction, facet items from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	Mediators: Romantic Relationship Stress; adapted RRSS (Du Bois et al., 2016)	Active Twitter and IG use, but not FB, is negatively associated with increased romantic relationship satisfaction, through increased romantic relationship stress.

Table 2 (Continued)

Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
6 de Lenne et al. (2019)	Belgium	$n = 427$ emerging and young adults; 71.20% female; 28.80% male; $M_{age} = 23.16$; RS = 100% current	Cross-sectional survey examining the role of SNS use and exposure to alternative partners on relationship commitment.	Various SNS	Pursuing alternatives, adapted Online Monitoring of Alternatives Scale (West, 2013)	Commitment, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	Mediators: Pursuing Alternatives, adapted Online Monitoring of Alternatives Scale (West, 2013); Romantic Comparison to Alternative Partners, adapted Online Social Comparison Scale (West, 2013)	Exposure to alternative partners on SNS is directly related to relationship commitment through the pursuit of these alternatives. While exposure to alternatives is positively related to romantic comparison, engaging in such comparison does not reduce commitment. Participants tend to use IG differently in distinct relationship statuses.
7 Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) Study 1	Hungary	$n = 18$; female ($n = 13$), male ($n = 5$); $M_{age} = 21.5$	Qualitative research design exploring psychological functions that IG fulfils in romantic relationships and processes overlooked by big data analyses.	IG	IG use in general, in-depth interview questions	Relationship stages, in-depth interview questions		
Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) Study 2	Hungary	$n = 238$ s; 82.4% female; $M_{age} = 23.15$; RS = 67.6% current	Cross-sectional survey examining whether IG activity is significantly different at the beginning and at the end of a relationship	IG	IG activity, questions regarding post frequency, daily time spent on IG	Relationship stages, questions regarding importance of IG, importance of presenting the relationship on IG, presenting new relationship or break-up on IG, changes in IG activity after relationship status change	Mediators: Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988); Jealousy, 4 items measuring jealousy	IG activity differs depending on relationship status. In new relationships, participants reduce online activity, posting fewer pictures about themselves or their social life. After break-ups, activity and communication increase. Jealousy and satisfaction are predictors of IG usage patterns.

Table 2 (Continued)

Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings	
8	González-Rivera and Hernández-Gato (2019)	Puerto Rico	$n = 938$; 59.5% female, 40.5% male; $M_{age} = 33.92$; RS = 44.1% marriage, 55.9% cohabitating	Cross-sectional survey examining the effects of FB intrusion on relationship satisfaction, focusing on conflict and jealousy as mediators.	FB	Intrusion, Conflicts in Romantic Relationships Over Facebook Use Scales (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019)	Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988)	Mediators: Conflicts, Conflicts in Romantic Relationships Over Facebook Use Scales (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019); Jealousy, Conflicts in Romantic Relationships Over Facebook Use Scales (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019)	Partner FB intrusion has indirect effect on relationship satisfaction through conflict and jealousy over FB use.
9	Ito et al. (2021) Study 1	China	$n = 224$; female ($n = 147$), male ($n = 77$); $M_{age} = 36.04$; RS = 77.7% current	Pre-test post-test, quasi-experimental design examining the influence of FB manifestations of relationship awareness on romantic partners' relationship satisfaction.	FB	PRFB, imagination tasks	Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988)	Commitment, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	Relationship awareness cues on Facebook positively influence relationship satisfaction, with the effect mediated by perceived partner commitment.
	Ito et al. (2021) Study 2	China	$n = 157$; female ($n = 113$), male ($n = 44$); $M_{age} = 21.32$; RS = 61.34% current	Pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design examining how the introduction and removal of relationship awareness cues on FB affects perceived partner commitment and relationship satisfaction, with perceived partner commitment as a potential mediator.	FB	PRFB, imagination tasks	Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988)	Commitment, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	Introducing cues of relationship awareness was positively associated and removing cues of relationship awareness was negatively associated with perceived partner commitment, which in turn, was associated with participants' relationship satisfaction.

Table 2 (Continued)

	Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
10	Konlan et al. (2023) Study 1	Ghana	$n = 55$; 38.2% female, 61.8 % male; $M_{age} = 28$; RS = 100% married	Cross-sectional design (sequential mixed method) examining the effects of social media dependency on marital relationships.	Various SNS	Intrusions, questions regarding social media usage patterns			Most romantic couples use multiple SNS platforms, with 96.1% on WhatsApp and 92.7% on Facebook. WhatsApp and Facebook provide flexibility for interacting across groups and meeting new people. Users spend an average of 21 hours per week and 0.89 hours per visit on SNS, with multiple daily visits.
	Konlan et al. (2023) Study 2	Ghana	$n = 10$ (subsample study 1); age range = 20-45; RS = 100% married	Qualitative research design (sequential mixed method) examining the effects of social media dependency on marital relationships.	Various SNS	Intrusions, questions regarding social media usage patterns	Long-term relationships' well-being, in-depth interview questions	Mediators: Partner monitoring, suspicion, jealousy, mistrust, in-depth interview questions	High dependency on SNS leads to increased partner monitoring, suspicion, jealousy, and mistrust between couples negatively affecting long-term relationships' well-being.
11	Quiroz and Mickelson (2021)	USA	$n = 432$; 61.6 % female, 37.3% male, 1.2% prefer not to answer; $M_{age} = 28.05$; RS = 53.2% dating RO = 83.8% heterosexual, 3.2% homosexual, 10.4% bisexual, 1.6% other, 0.9% prefer not to answer	Cross-sectional survey examining the association between frequency of social media use and relationship health (relationship satisfaction and commitment), with types of social media use (active vs. passive) as moderators.	FB, IG, Twitter, Snapchat	Intrusion, questions regarding frequency of SNS use	Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988); Commitment, Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998)	Moderators: Active SNS use, adapted 6 items measuring active SNS use (Pagani et al., 2011); Passive SNS use, PSNSU (Chen et al., 2016)	Women who passively use social media at moderate to high levels exhibited negative associations between hours per day of social media use and relationship health (i.e., satisfaction and commitment). Active use enhances this association for both genders.

Table 2 (Continued)

Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
12 Quiroz et al. (2024) Study 1	USA	$n = 717$ 6 th and 9 th grade students; 49.3% girls; $M_{age} = 13.73$; RS = 57.8% ever dated, 5.8% never dated, 1.2% not sure	Experimental design examining how gender similarity, familiarity, and popularity of an individual in an IG post influenced participants' feelings of upset and jealousy and their likelihood in engaging in DDA behaviours if their partner "liked" the post.	IG	Surveillance, experimental stimuli	DDA, questions measuring the likelihood of engaging in DDA behaviours	Mediators: Relationship-specific emotional reactions, questions measuring feeling upset and feeling jealous	Adolescent feel more upset, more jealous, and engage in more DDA behaviours (i.e., controlling, confronting, monitoring) when their romantic partner "likes" an IG post from a same-gender digital relationship threat, with feeling upset and jealousy mediating the association between gender similarity and DDA behaviours.
Quiroz et al. (2024) Study 2	USA	$n = 140$ undergraduate students; 58.5% female, 39.4% male, 0.7% other, 1.4% no answer; $M_{age} = 20.4$	Experimental design examining, replication of study 1, examining the impact of gender similarity and attractiveness.	IG	Surveillance, experimental stimuli	DDA, questions measuring the likelihood of engaging in DDA behaviours	Mediators: Relationship-specific emotional reactions, questions measuring feeling upset and feeling jealous	Attractiveness of a digital relationship threat also increased jealousy and DDA behaviours.
13 Satici et al. (2023)	Turkey	$n = 334$ undergraduate students; 64% female, 36% male, $M_{age} = 20.71$; RS = 100% current	Cross-sectional survey examining psychological distress as a mediator between social media addiction and relationship satisfaction.	Various social media platforms	Intrusion, SMD (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2016)	Relationship Satisfaction, RAS (Hendrick, 1988)	Mediators: Psychological Distress, DASS-12 (Henry & Crawford, 2005)	Psychological distress (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress), partially mediated the impact of social media social media addiction on romantic relationship satisfaction.

Table 2 (Continued)

Reference	Country	Sample	Study Aim and Design	Social Media Platform	Social Media Usage Behaviours (measure)	Relational Outcomes (measure)	Moderators and Mediators (measure)	Findings
14 Sharabi and Hopkins (2021)	USA	$n = 178$ mixed-sex couples; 50% female, 50% male; $M_{age} = 20.15$; RS = 100% current	Cross-sectional survey examining the association between relationship quality, attention to alternatives, and couples' activities on IG.	IG	PRFB, questions about user activity data and observation of couple's behaviours on social media; Pursuing Alternatives, 3 items measuring liking, commenting, and directing messaging others	Relationship quality, Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998); Alternative Partner Pursuit, adapted Facebook-related Conflict Scale		Perceptions of alternative quality were linked to less engagement on an individual's IG. Higher relationship satisfaction, investment, and commitment (i.e., relationship quality) were associated with more engagement with the relationship on IG, as evidence by the number of couple pictures that an individual posted and the amount of likes and comments from a partner on their page. Greater attention to alternatives on IG is linked to increased pursuit of alternative partners.

Note. RS = relationship status; RO = relationship orientations; FB = Facebook; Instagram = IG; SNS = Social Networking Sites; FIQ = Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire; MDS = Marital Disaffection Scale; CSI = Couples Satisfaction Index; PAUM = Passive and Active Facebook Use Measure; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale; RRSS = Romantic Relationship Stress Scale; SMD = Social Media Disorder Scale; DASS-12 = Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale; PSNU = Passive SNS Use; DDA = Digital Dating Abuse.

Study Characteristics

Most studies were conducted in the United States ($n = 6$), with others from Nigeria ($n = 2$), Belgium ($n = 1$), China ($n = 1$), Ghana ($n = 1$), Hungary ($n = 1$), Puerto Rico ($n = 1$), and Turkey ($n = 1$). The majority of studies employed cross-sectional designs ($n = 9$), alongside two mixed-methods studies, one qualitative study, one quasi-experimental study, and one experimental study.

Sample Characteristics

Sample sizes ranged from 10 to 938 participants. Most studies ($n = 12$) focused on individuals currently in a romantic relationship, though criteria varied. For instance, Quiroz and Mickelson (2021) included participants in monogamous relationships of at least three months, while González-Rivera and Hernández-Gato (2019) required a minimum relationship duration of one year. Three studies included only married couples (Abbasi et al., 2019; Arikewuyo et al., 2021; Konlan et al., 2023), and two others included participants regardless of current relationship status (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022; Quiroz et al., 2024). In addition, three studies also included individuals who had previously been in a romantic relationship (Delle et al., 2023; Ito et al., 2021; Quiroz et al., 2024). With most samples focused on those in active relationships, the primary emphasis was on the maintenance stage of relationships ($n = 13$). Only one study explored Instagram usage across various relationship stages (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022).

Notably, two studies required participants to actively use social media (Abbasi et al., 2019; Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022), while four other studies included participants who only had social media accounts without requiring active engagement on the platforms (Bouffard et al., 2022; Delle et al., 2023; Ito et al., 2021; Stewart & Clayton, 2022). The remaining studies did not specify social media usage requirements.

The studies explored a variety of social media platforms, with some focusing on multiple platforms and SNSs ($n = 5$), and others concentrating exclusively on Instagram ($n = 4$) or Facebook ($n = 3$). Two studies investigated specific combinations of platforms. For example, Delle et al. (2022) focused solely on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, while Quiroz and Mickelson (2021) included these platforms along with Snapchat.

Most studies had a majority of female participants, with over 60% of participants being women ($n = 10$). The focus was largely on younger populations, with a lowest mean age of 13.73 years and a highest mean age of 36.54 years. Several studies ($n = 5$) targeted undergraduate student populations (Arikewuyo et al., 2022; Bouffard et al., 2022; de Lenne et al., 2019; Quiroz et al., 2024; Satıcı et al., 2023).

Almost all of the included studies did not recruit participants based on their sexual orientation, apart from one study that exclusively included heterosexual samples (Abbasi et al., 2019). Moreover, most studies did not specify the sexual orientation of participants at all. A few studies, however, offered more detailed information about how they measured and reported sexual orientation. For example, Quiroz and Mickelson (2021) used a self-report measure allowing participants to identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, “other”, or to select “prefer not to answer”. Delle et al. (2022) included these same sexual identities but extended their inclusivity by also incorporating queer, pansexual, same-gender loving, and asexual identities, providing an even broader representation of sexual orientations.

Social Media Usage Behaviours and Measures

Most studies were classified under the social media usage behaviour of intrusion ($n = 8$). One study broadly examined intrusion, exploring its general impact on romantic relationships without focusing on a specific type (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019). In contrast, others focused on specific forms of excessive social media use ($n = 5$). For instance, Bouffard et al. (2022) investigated prolonged Instagram use and Konlan et al.

(2023) focused on high SNS dependency. Two studies addressed social media addiction specifically (Abbasi et al., 2019; Satici et al., 2023). The majority of the studies ($n = 5$) employed surveys to assess intrusion. Tools like the Facebook Intrusion Questionnaire (Elphinston & Noller, 2011), the Conflicts in Romantic Relationships Over Facebook Use Scale (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019), and the Social Media Disorder Scale (Bouffard et al., 2022) were employed to capture intrusion related to specific social media platforms. Other tools like the Social Media Disorder Scale (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2016) and the Passive Active SNS Use Measure Scale (Gerson et al., 2017) assessed overall social media addiction. Lastly, two studies designed questions to assess participants' social media usage, specifically focusing on which platforms they subscribed to, the most frequently used SNS platforms, and the amount of time spent on these sites (Konlan et al., 2023; Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021)

Additionally, one study was classified under the social media usage behaviour of surveillance (Quiroz et al., 2024), employing experimental stimuli by asking participants to imagine their romantic partner liking an Instagram post. Moreover, two studies were classified into the social media usage behaviour of PRFB. One study used imagination tasks where participants envisioned their partner using a personal profile picture, having an empty Facebook profile, or posting status updates about themselves (Ito et al., 2021). The other study by Sharabi and Hopkins (2021) not only examined PRFB by observing couples' social media behaviours, but also considered pursuing alternatives, using a scale to measure likes, comments, and direct messaging to assess attention to alternatives. Further, de Lenne et al. (2019) focused solely on pursuing alternatives, conducting the adapted Online Monitoring of Alternative Scale (West, 2013) to measure exposure to and pursuit of alternative partners on SNS.

Lastly, two studies broadly examined social media use without focusing on specific types of social media usage behaviours. Arikewuyo et al. (2022) applied a general survey to measure overall social media use (Song et al., 2004), while Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) used a mixed-methods approach, employing semi-structured interviews in study 1 and a survey in study 2 to explore Instagram usage patterns, including post frequency, daily usage, relationship presentation, and changes in activity after relationship changes.

The Relationship Between Social Media Use and Relational Outcomes and The Role of Mediators and Moderators

The studies included in this scoping review explored various relational outcomes, which can be categorized into (a) behavioural actions, (b) relational characteristics, and (c) individual characteristics.

Behavioural Actions

First, behavioural actions refer to specific actions within the relationship, such as *conflicts* ($n = 2$), *digital dating abuse* (DDA) ($n = 1$), and *negative outcomes* ($n = 1$). Arikewuyo et al. (2022) identified a significant relationship between social media use and conflict in romantic relationships, mediated by jealousy, infidelity, and partner monitoring. Similarly, Bouffard et al. (2022) found that prolonged Instagram use reduces overall relationship satisfaction, which in turn heightens conflicts and leads to negative outcomes. Conversely, they highlighted that a willingness to sacrifice for one's partner improved relationship satisfaction, thereby reducing conflicts and mitigating negative outcomes. Additionally, Quiroz et al. (2024) investigated DDA behaviours, including monitoring, confronting, and controlling a romantic partner, finding that a partner "liking" another individual's Instagram photo heightened jealousy and upset, which mediated increased DDA behaviours. Jealousy was most pronounced when the post featured a highly attractive individual.

Relational Characteristics

Next, relational characteristics relate to the overall quality of the relationship and include factors such as *relationship satisfaction* ($n = 6$), *relationship commitment* ($n = 2$), *marital disaffection* ($n = 1$), and *relationship well-being* ($n = 1$). Social media use impacts relationship satisfaction in both positive and negative ways. One study indicated that PRFB, like sharing couple-oriented content on social media (e.g., a profile picture with one's partner), correlated with higher relationship satisfaction, mediated by increased commitment (Ito et al., 2021). In contrast, other studies highlighted negative associations between social media usage behaviours such as intrusion and monitoring and relational outcomes. For instance, Satici et al. (2023) found that social media addiction reduced relationship satisfaction, with depression, anxiety, and stress playing a mediating role. Similarly, González-Rivera and Hernández-Gato (2019) indicated that partner Facebook intrusion indirectly reduced satisfaction through increased conflict and jealousy. Further, Delle et al. (2022) reported that active Twitter and Instagram use, but not Facebook use, was negatively associated with increased romantic relationship satisfaction, mediated by heightened romantic relationship stress. While multiplex social media use can enhance satisfaction through expressions of love and attraction, Arikewuyo et al. (2021) also noted that it could lead to jealousy, infidelity, and partner monitoring, ultimately reducing satisfaction.

Commitment was another relational characteristic affected by social media usage behaviours like intrusion and exposure to alternatives. Quiroz and Mickelson (2021) explored how different types of social media use (i.e., active vs. passive use) moderated the relationship between hours per day of social media use and relationship health (i.e., relationship satisfaction and commitment). Their results indicated that women who passively used social media at moderate to high levels experienced greater declines in both satisfaction and commitment. Active social media use intensified these negative effects on relationship

health for both men and women. In addition, de Lenne et al. (2019) took a different approach by examining the role of alternatives present on social media in affecting commitment. Their findings indicated that exposure to alternative partners on SNS did not directly reduce commitment but indirectly lowered it through the active pursuit of these alternatives.

Furthermore, Abbasi et al. (2019) found that Facebook addiction is positively associated with marital disaffection, defined as the gradual loss of love, care, and emotional disconnection. Commitment moderated this association, suggesting that spouses who reported stronger commitment were less likely to experience these negative effects. Lastly, Konlan et al. (2023) linked social media dependency to reduced relationship well-being, highlighting the role of jealousy, mistrust, and partner monitoring.

Individual Characteristics

Lastly, individual characteristics refer to personal emotions and psychological states, but no relational outcomes explicitly related to this category were identified in the reviewed studies.

Measurement Tools

Most studies appeared to rely on surveys to measure these outcomes, which can be divided into standardized questionnaires and adapted instruments, while some used semi-structured interviews. For example, standardized tools like the Relationship Assessment Scale (González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019; Ito et al., 2021; Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021; Satıcı et al., 2023) and the Investment Model Scale (Delle et al., 2022) were used to measure relationship satisfaction, while the Marital Disaffection Scale (Abbasi et al., 2019) assessed marital disaffection. In some cases, existing instruments were modified to suit specific contexts. For instance, Arikewuyo et al. (2022) adapted Clayton et al. (2013)'s survey, originally designed for Facebook-related conflicts, to better reflect Instagram features.

Similarly, Bouffard et al. (2022) adjusted Clayton et al. (2013)'s survey to assess Instagram-related negative outcomes.

Mediators and Moderators

Across the studies, 17 factors were identified as mediators or moderators, with 15 serving as mediators, one as a moderator, and one as both. Similar to the relational outcomes, the mediating and moderating factors were categorized into behavioural actions, relational characteristics, and individual characteristics. Behavioural actions, including *partner monitoring* ($n = 3$), *infidelity* ($n = 2$), *active versus passive social media use* ($n = 1$), *communication* ($n = 1$), *conflict* ($n = 1$), *distraction* ($n = 1$), *pursuing alternatives* ($n = 1$), mediated or moderated the relationship between social media use and relational outcomes. These findings highlight how specific actions within a relationship are influenced by or contribute to the impact of social media. Relational characteristics, such as *relationship commitment* ($n = 2$), *love and attraction* ($n = 1$), *relationship satisfaction* ($n = 1$), and *romantic relationship stress* ($n = 1$), emphasized how relationship dynamics can mediate or moderate the effects of social media use. Finally, individual characteristics, such as *jealousy* ($n = 5$), *feeling upset* ($n = 1$), *mistrust* ($n = 1$), *suspicion* ($n = 1$), and *psychological distress* ($n = 1$), highlighted the emotional and psychological pathways linking social media behaviours to relational outcomes. Most studies focused on a single mediator or moderator (Arikewuyo et al., 2022; Arikewuyo et al., 2021; Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022; González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019; Konlan et al., 2023), although some examined multiple factors in their analyses (Abbasi et al., 2019; Bouffard et al., 2022; Delle et al., 2023; Ito et al., 2021; Quiroz et al., 2024; Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021; Satıcı et al., 2023).

The Effect of Relational Characteristics on Social Media Use

While most studies examined social media use as an independent variable influencing relational outcomes, some research took an inversive approach by analysing how relationship

characteristics affect social media behaviours. For instance, Sharabi and Hopkins (2021) found that higher relationship satisfaction, investment, and commitment led to increased Instagram engagement, including more couple photos and partner-initiated likes and comments. Additionally, they discovered that perceiving having higher quality alternatives on Instagram was linked to less visibility as a couple on Instagram. Similarly, Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) findings indicated that online behaviour shifted depending on relationship status. At the beginning of a new relationship, users uploaded fewer personal photos, while post-breakup activity and indirect communication through Instagram significantly increased. Key factors such as jealousy and relationship satisfaction influenced these Instagram usage patterns, including post frequency, time spent on the platform, and the importance of Instagram.

Discussion

The 14 included studies were systematically reviewed to explore the depth and breadth of existing research on the association between social media use and romantic relationships. This section critically evaluates the main findings, addresses the limitations of the scoping review, and offers recommendations for future research.

Main Findings

Most of the included studies employed cross-sectional designs, often relying on self-reported data to explore the associations between social media use and relational outcomes. While cross-sectional studies provide a snapshot of these associations, they cannot establish causation (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Longitudinal studies are needed to capture how the effects of social media behaviours on relationships evolve over time. Self-reported data also introduces potential biases, like social desirability and recall errors (Bauhoff, 2024). Although two studies used mixed methods, future research could benefit from adding observational or experimental designs to provide more objective measures of specific social media usage

behaviours and their impact on relational outcomes, enabling stronger evidence and more precise conclusions. Moreover, the studies were conducted across various countries, highlighting the global reach of social media and its influence on romantic relationships (Statista, 2024b). However, most studies were conducted in the USA, reflecting a Western-centric focus, which limits the generalizability of the findings to non-Western settings. Consequently, cultural differences in social media behaviour and relationship dynamics may not be fully captured in the current research (Alsaleh et al., 2019).

Nearly all the reviewed studies required participants to be in a romantic relationship and active social media users, with samples primarily consisting of young adults and an overrepresentation of female participants. While young adults are the most active social media users (Smith & Anderson, 2018), older adults may use social media differently and experience distinct relational outcomes. Similarly, the overrepresentation of female participants may introduce gender bias, as social media behaviours and relational dynamics can vary by gender. For instance, Jackson et al. (2001) found that females are more likely to use online platforms for communication and information exchange, while males tend toward information-seeking. This suggests that females may use social media in more relationally oriented ways, potentially affecting relational outcomes differently. Furthermore, females tend to invest more time in maintaining social relationships (Eagly & Wood, 1999), suggesting that they may be more prone than men to the emotional challenges associated with social media interactions. Overall, this gendered and age-related use of social media suggests that relational outcomes may differ by both gender and age. Future research should explore how gender and age moderate the relationship between social media use and relational outcomes, while more balanced samples could improve the generalizability of findings. Moreover, most studies did not report participants' sexual orientation, with ten out of fourteen providing no information on this aspect. Including diverse orientations is essential, as

research indicates differences in social media use across sexual orientations, which can lead to varying impacts on relationship outcomes. For example, LGB young adults often turn to social media to find support, explore their sexual identity, and connect with like-minded individuals (DeHaan et al., 2013; Lucassen et al., 2018). This omission creates a gap in the literature, limiting the generalizability of findings and leaving it unclear which orientations are represented or overlooked.

Several studies focused on specific platforms, particularly Instagram and Facebook, while others examined multiple platforms simultaneously without indicating which ones were included. Platforms like Snapchat and TikTok are rapidly gaining popularity, with 1.58 billion active users on TikTok and 800 million on Snapchat as of April 2024 (Statista, 2024b). Despite their growing influence, studies explicitly focusing on these platforms were limited at the time of this review and thus not included. Each platform has unique features that may impact relational outcomes in different ways. For example, Snapchat allows users to share snaps, such as pictures and short videos that include text and drawings, which disappear after viewing (Snapchat, n.d.). This feature promotes private communication that may strengthen closeness but also introduce secrecy in relationships (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). TikTok, on the other hand, allows users to create and consume short videos tailored to their preferences and liked content (TikTok, n.d.). TikTok may enhance relationships by enabling couples to share or watch content together, yet it may also lead to unrealistic comparisons by showing idealized portrayals of relationships (Langlais et al., 2024). Overall, the current review highlights a gap in understanding how each platform's unique features might differently impact romantic relationships.

Most studies focused on the maintenance stage of relationships, likely because participants were required to be in a romantic relationship. This phase is essential, as it often represents the longest period in relationships and social media helps maintain connection,

especially for long-distance couples (Billedo et al., 2015; Canary & Stafford, 1992). However, the initiation and dissolution stages, while equally important, are less studied. In the initiation stage, social media can facilitate exploring romantic possibilities, flirting, and making initial contact (Finkel et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2022; Recalde-Esnoz et al., 2024). However, as the search terms focused on “dating” and did not include aspects like “flirting”, this review does not fully address the broader behaviours involved in forming romantic connections. Still, many of these activities seem to occur through dating apps like Tinder (Bodidasa, 2024; Erevik et al., 2020), which is beyond the scope of this study. The dissolution stage also reveals important dynamics, as behaviors like post-breakup surveillance on social media can complicate the process of moving on (Brody et al., 2020). This imbalance suggests a need for more research on how social media influences both the formation and dissolution of romantic relationships. Notably, the study by Fejes-Vékássy et al. (2022) stands out in this context, as it examined Instagram use across different relationship stages, providing valuable insights into how social media behaviours evolve over time.

In terms of social media usage behaviours, they were categorized into PRFB, pursuing alternatives, surveillance, and intrusion. The findings of this review are in line with previous research that social media use is associated with both positive and negative relational outcomes, depending on the type of usage behaviour (Coundouris et al., 2021; Rus & Tiemensma, 2017). Notably, surveillance, intrusion, and pursuing alternatives were consistently associated with various negative outcomes, including conflict, marital disaffection, and lower satisfaction (Abbasi et al., 2019; Arikewuyo et al., 2022; Arikewuyo et al., 2021; Bouffard et al., 2022; Delle et al., 2023; González-Rivera & Hernández-Gato, 2019). Among these, intrusion – where social media becomes integrated into daily life, often leading to excessive use or addiction (Coundouris et al., 2021) – received the most attention. This emphasis reflects the growing prevalence of social media in everyday routines (Kuss &

Griffiths, 2011) and the global concern surrounding social media addiction (Cheng et al., 2021). Consequently, intrusion appears to be a prominent focus in research on relational outcomes. In contrast, PRFB represents the only positive social media usage behaviour, involving activities such as sharing relationship milestones or engaging in joint social media interactions. While PRFBs have been associated with improved relationship health, particularly satisfaction and commitment (Ito et al., 2021; Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021), they remain relatively unexplored in the literature. This gap highlights the need for more balanced research to explore how positive social media engagement can support romantic relationships, helping to inform targeted interventions that reduce negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes.

Relational outcomes varied across studies and were categorized into individual characteristics, relational characteristics, and behavioural actions, demonstrating that social media use impacts multiple aspects of relationships across these categories. Among these, relational characteristics, such as satisfaction, commitment, well-being, and marital disaffection, were the most frequently studied. In contrast, behavioural actions, including conflicts, negative outcomes, and DDA, were typically addressed in only one or two studies, whereas individual characteristics did not include any identified relational outcomes in the reviewed studies. Furthermore, findings indicate that a range of mediating and moderating factors influence the association between social media use and romantic relationships, identified in 13 out of 14 studies. This consistent recognition underscores the complexity of the relationship, highlighting an awareness that these associations are shaped by additional underlying factors. Mediators were more commonly examined than moderators, reflecting a research emphasis on understanding how social media impacts relationships rather than on factors that might buffer or intensify these effects (MacKinnon & Luecken, 2008). The mediating and moderating factors were categorized using the same framework as the

relational outcomes: individual characteristics, relational characteristics, and behavioural actions. Notably, while behavioural actions and individual characteristics were less studied as relational outcomes, they were more frequently explored as mediators and moderators. On the other hand, relational characteristics, which were the most studied as relational outcomes, were less frequently examined as mediators or moderators. This pattern highlights that relational characteristics are primarily viewed as direct indicators of relationship quality, whereas behavioural actions and individual characteristics are often used to explain the mechanisms and processes influencing relationships. Furthermore, the large number of relational outcomes and mediating and moderating factors studied, reflects a fragmented research field, with most outcomes and factors investigated only once or twice. While relationship satisfaction was the most frequently studied relational outcome and jealousy was the most commonly examined mediator, other outcomes and mediators received far less attention. Although the research is broad and exploratory, further studies on less-studied outcomes and factors are needed to identify reliable patterns and deepen our understanding of social media's impact on romantic relationships. Additionally, the definition and measurement of relational outcomes and factors vary significantly across studies, leading to inconsistencies in the literature. For instance, some studies conceptualize relationship quality broadly, including satisfaction, commitment, and involvement (Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021), while others define relationship health specifically in terms of satisfaction and commitment (Quiroz & Mickelson, 2021). In contrast, some studies adopt a narrower focus, examining only one component, such as satisfaction or commitment (Ito et al., 2021; Satici et al., 2023). Similarly, DDA is sometimes broadly defined to include behaviours like monitoring, controlling, and confronting (Quiroz et al., 2024), whereas other studies focus exclusively on monitoring (Fox & Warber, 2014). These inconsistencies hinder the comparability of findings

and limit the generalizability of conclusions. Standardizing definitions and measures are therefore essential to improve consistency and understanding across studies.

Notably, most of the studies analyzed the relationship with social media usage behaviours as the independent variable (IV), influencing relational outcomes, which served as the dependent variable (DV). However, two studies adopted the inverse approach, investigating how relationship characteristics influence social media behaviours (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2022; Sharabi & Hopkins, 2021). This highlights the bidirectional nature of the relationship between social media use and relational outcomes, emphasizing that future research should consider both directions of influence.

Limitations

While this review offers valuable insights into the relationship outcomes associated with social media use, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the review was conducted by a single researcher, which may introduce bias due to the lack of inter-rater reliability (Grant & Booth, 2009). Involving a second reviewer could have improved the reliability of the study selection process and reduced the risk of overlooking relevant studies (Stoll et al., 2019). Second, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included, excluding gray literature. While gray literature can provide additional insights and reduce publication bias (Benzies et al., 2006; Conn et al., 2003), peer-reviewed articles were selected to ensure the scientific rigor and credibility of the review (Paez, 2017). A further limitation is the absence of a formal quality assessment, which is typical in scoping reviews. Since the aim is to cover a broad area, evaluating the methodological quality of the included studies was not conducted, potentially affecting the interpretation of the findings. Next, the search string used in the database search focused on specific relational outcomes, such as satisfaction and commitment, which may have excluded studies addressing other relevant outcomes, such as trust or intimacy. While this approach was chosen to maintain a clear scope and avoid an

unmanageable number of unrelated studies, it may have limited the exploration of a broader range of relational dynamics influenced by social media use. Lastly, the topic of social media use and relational outcomes is rapidly evolving, with new studies published even during the course of this review. This ongoing development presents a limitation, as it highlights the challenge of capturing a fully comprehensive view in a dynamic growing field. Future updates to the literature review may be necessary to keep pace with the latest research developments.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several gaps in the literature suggest areas for future research. First, a critical area for exploration is the role of relationship length, an often-overlooked factor in the studies reviewed. The dynamics of social media use in long-term relationships may differ from those in shorter or newly formed relationships. Future research should examine how relationship duration moderates the effects of social media behaviours on relational outcomes.

Second, inconsistent measurement of social media usage behaviours, relational outcomes, and mediating and moderating factors poses a key limitation. For instance, intrusion has been assessed using varied methods, including in-depth interview questions, logged time on platforms, or validated questionnaires. Similarly, relational outcomes like commitment and conflicts have been measured with both validated scales and items adapted or developed for individual studies. These inconsistencies hinder comparability and make it challenging to synthesize findings across studies. Future research should prioritize the development and adoption of standardized tools to ensure consistency in measuring social media usage behaviours, relational outcomes, and mediating and moderating factors.

Lastly, refining the classification of social media usage behaviours could help capture a broader and more nuanced range of activities. Existing categories, such as “intrusion” and “surveillance”, might benefit from further refinement or expansion to reflect the diverse ways

people engage with social media in romantic contexts. More specific categories, perhaps incorporating varying levels of interaction intensity or emotional involvement, could reveal distinct relationship impacts and help clarify the mechanisms through which social media influences relational dynamics.

Conclusion

In summary, this scoping review offers an updated perspective on the complex interactions between social media use and romantic relationship outcomes. While social media can enhance relationship satisfaction and commitment through positive engagement, it can also introduce relational challenges such as conflict, jealousy, infidelity, and digital dating abuse. The nuanced effects of social media on relationships depend largely on how individuals use these platforms, as well as the mediating and moderating factors. Overall, this highlights the importance of further investigating social media usage behaviours and their consequences, as it displays a serious issue, potentially harming relationships. As social media continues to evolve, ongoing research is essential to provide updated insights and inform practices that promote relational health in the digital age.

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Note. Papers marked with * are review papers.