

The Diversity of Love Journal

A New Study Reveals the Best Ways to Indicate Romantic Commitment Online

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How do you know that your partner is committed to your relationship based on social media communication? Research findings indicate that the strongest signs of romantic commitment on social media are actions that deliberately oppose engaging with appealing alternatives.

Social Media Can Be Beneficial and Detrimental to Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships have changed significantly because of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and multiple dating apps. They give people access to an abundance of information about past and potential romantic partners with whom they are in contact. This can be good or bad.

On the one hand, these online platforms can help people stay in touch. On the other hand, these online platforms can also connect individuals with attractive partners, potentially causing feelings of jealousy and anxiety. These possibilities on social media make individuals with high anxiety and an insecure attachment style especially vulnerable. This ambiguous nature of social media can make these online apps both beneficial and detrimental.

Researchers are interested in knowing what kinds of online behaviors might help anxious people deal with these psychological threats and successfully maintain relationships.

A Study Examined the Impact of Social Media Behaviors on Romantic Commitment

According to a [recent study](#), certain social media behaviors, particularly for those with high levels of attachment anxiety, can improve the stability of their relationships. The results show that actions that actively resist interactions with alluring alternatives are the best indicators of romantic commitment on social media.

Alexandra E. Black, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States, conducted two studies on the topic. She investigated how committed individuals perceive their partners' social media activities, as well as how these activities influence feelings of relationship security and satisfaction.

The author published the results of these studies in her article "[Responding to threatening online alternatives: Perceiving the partner's commitment through their social media behaviors](#)" in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Why The Study Is Interesting

The author of the article Alexandra Black, a postdoctoral scholar at the [Social Connection and Positive Psychology Lab](#) at Arizona State University, said,

"I have been interested in how people perceive threats to their romantic relationships for quite some time, but I wanted to apply it to today's current dating world with the use of social media and dating apps."

Alexandra Black

She has been interested in knowing what a romantic partner's commitment level is when they are interacting with attractive others. The advent of social media has complicated these types of interactions:

“With physically attractive people readily available on social media sites like Instagram and TikTok, it can be difficult for people to feel satisfied and committed in their relationships.”

Alexandra Black

As Alexandra commented,

“I wanted to answer the question of what a romantic partner can do that signals they are committed to help ease the other person's anxiety and allow them to feel more secure in their relationship.”

How the Researcher Conducted the Studies

The research comprised several phases, encompassing two pilot studies and two primary experiments.

In the initial pilot study, the author asked 240 undergraduate students to compile a list of online behaviors that indicate commitment in a relationship. This led to the initial identification of 81 behaviors.

However, after conducting a second pilot study with 149 undergraduate participants, the researcher reduced the list to 24 behaviors based on ratings of their likelihood and perceived commitment.

The First Experiment Showed

In the first experiment, a total of 900 individuals were randomly allocated to assess vignettes in which potential partners either exhibited or did not exhibit behaviors that indicate commitment. Subsequently, the participants assessed the perceived degree of dedication exhibited by their partner. The following behaviors were found to be the most

effective in conveying commitment: removing dating applications, disregarding flirtatious messages, indicating relationship status, and unfollowing potential rivals.

As Alexandra Black noted,

“If you are trying to determine if someone you’ve just started dating is committed to you, pay attention to how they interact with attractive people on social media, Are they still responding to flirtatious DMs? Have they deleted their dating apps? These behaviors can signal important information about how your partner views your relationship.”

[PsyPost by Eric W. Dolan](#)

The Second Experiment Revealed

The second experiment examined these behaviors in a controlled experimental environment. The researcher gave participants a hypothetical situation in which they found out that their partner was engaging in intimate interactions with an attractive alternative on social media.

Participants were subsequently allocated at random to read either

- a high-commitment response from their partner (such as explicitly informing the alternative person that they were in a committed relationship and unfollowing them) or
- a neutral response (such as engaging in a conversation about a humorous video).

The researchers assessed the participants’ levels of relationship security and satisfaction both before and after implementing these manipulations.

The author discovered that individuals who experience high attachment anxiety reported notably elevated levels of unease, concern, and envy when envisioning their partner engaging with an appealing alternative on social media. This verifies that such situations are especially troubling for individuals with anxiety.

Remarkably, the partner's display of strong commitment on social media effectively heightened the perception of partner commitment and reduced the perception of alternative options, irrespective of the participant's attachment style.

However, these behaviors did not substantially improve feelings of security or relationship satisfaction for individuals with anxiety, as initially predicted. This implies that although explicit signals of commitment are significant, they may not be enough to completely alleviate the profound insecurities and fears linked to attachment anxiety.

As the author finally concluded,

“I was surprised that it is not when a partner posts about you or likes your content that most impacts feelings of commitment. Instead, it matters more when a partner is actively shutting down threats from attractive people. It appears, at least from my work, that effective commitment expressions on social media rely less on a presence of the positive and instead require an absence of the negative.”

Alexandra Black

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