

Master's Degree in
**Data Science
and Advanced Analytics**

Specialization in
Business Analytics

**The Dark Side of
Technology: The Role of
Social Media Features
on Social Media
Infidelity-Related
Behaviors**

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**THE DARK SIDE OF TECHNOLOGY: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FEATURES
ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFIDELITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS**

by

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in
Data Science and Advanced Analytics, with a specialization in Business Analytics

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February, 2026

STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

Lisbon, 15th February 2026

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my beloved parents and my friend (Foazul Islam) who worked hard for fulfilling that course and gave fund of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Mijail Naranjo and my friend (Foazul Islam) for their invaluable insights, patience, and continuous support throughout this research journey. Their expertise and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping this work. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to my professors and mentors at University of NOVA IMS, whose teachings and encouragement have greatly contributed to my academic growth.

A special thank you to my family and friends for their unwavering, understanding, and motivation during this research. Their belief in my abilities has kept me motivated, especially during challenging times.

I am also grateful to all the participants who took the time to complete the survey for this study. Their willingness to share their experiences has been essential in making this research possible. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the impact of technology and digital communication on relationships, which served as the inspiration for this study. I hope this research contributes to a deeper understanding of social media's influence on interpersonal dynamics and encourages further exploration in this area.

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed interpersonal communication, while also introducing new challenges for romantic relationships. As platforms promote constant connectivity, private messaging, and emotional accessibility, concerns have grown regarding their potential to facilitate infidelity-related behaviors. This study explores the dark side of digital technology by examining how specific psychological and behavioral factors contribute to Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB). Drawing on contemporary relationship and digital behavior literature, the research investigates the effects of Social Networking Site Addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) on SMIRB. A quantitative approach was adopted, and data were collected through an online survey of 202 active social media users. The proposed model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that Attachment Anxiety, Relationship Ambivalence, and Problematic Internet Usage significantly and positively predict SMIRB. These results suggest that emotional insecurity, relational uncertainty, and maladaptive internet use increase vulnerability to digital boundary-crossing behaviors. In contrast, Social Networking Site Addiction and Sexual Satisfaction show no significant influence. Overall, the study highlights that psychological and relational vulnerabilities, rather than usage intensity alone, play a central role in technology-mediated infidelity.

KEYWORDS

Social Networking Site Addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU), PLS-SEM, Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA	Cronbach's alpha
DV	Dependent Variable
ECR-R	Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised
IVs	Independent Variables
PIU	Problematic Internet Usage
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
RA	Reliability analysis
RAMB	Relationship Ambivalence
SMIRB	Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors
SNSA	Social Networking Sites Addiction
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
SS	Sexual Satisfaction
STDEV	Standard Deviation
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The internet provides numerous platforms that allow individuals to connect with both familiar and unfamiliar people in virtual spaces. Among these platforms, social media has become one of the most widely used tools for online communication (Abbasi, 2019). Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat now play an essential role in daily life by enabling users to initiate, develop, and maintain both new and existing relationships. Their features—continuous accessibility, private messaging, and personalized interaction—make it easy to engage socially across wide distances. However, these same features also create relational risks. As SNSs expand rapidly and offer increasing opportunities for interpersonal engagement, they simultaneously facilitate behaviors that may violate relational boundaries. One of the most concerning consequences is the rise of social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB), where individuals engage in secretive, emotionally intimate, or sexually suggestive communication outside their primary relationship (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019; Şerban et al., 2022).

Research shows that social media features—including anonymity, privacy settings, and ease of communication—can facilitate emotional or sexually suggestive interactions outside committed relationships (McDaniel et al., 2017; Şerban et al., 2022; González-Rivera et al., 2019). These behaviors often involve befriending former lovers (or potential partners), flirting, maintaining secrecy, and having in-depth or sexual online chats (McDaniel et al., 2017). Such digital interactions mimic traditional forms of infidelity in their capacity to undermine trust and weaken relationship stability. González-Rivera et al. (2019) further emphasize that online environments make it easier for individuals to maintain inappropriate contact, especially when relationship satisfaction is low.

Several psychological and technological factors contribute to the likelihood of engaging in SMIRB. Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), characterized by excessive and compulsive use of SNSs, increases exposure to alternative romantic partners and heightens opportunities for boundary-crossing behaviors (Abbasi, 2019; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025). Individuals who spend large amounts of time online may experience



weakened self-control, greater emotional involvement with online contacts, and increased secrecy in their digital interactions.

Another significant factor is attachment anxiety. Individuals with anxious attachment styles often seek reassurance and fear abandonment. Because of their sensitivity and susceptibility in social situations, people with attachment anxiety may find it more difficult to develop and maintain relationships in the real world; hence, they could seek out compensatory emotional support from strangers online (Konok et al., 2016). This psychological vulnerability, combined with the immediacy of SNS communication, creates a heightened risk for SMIRB.

Relational dynamics also play a critical role. Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) —the presence of conflicting feelings about one’s partner—can create emotional uncertainty. Individuals who have ambivalence in their romantic relationships are more likely to engage in emotional infidelity practices on social media (González-Rivera et al., 2019). In addition, sexual satisfaction (SS) has been linked to the quality and stability of romantic relationships. González-Rivera et al. (2019) found that low emotional intimacy and low sexual pleasure are risk factors that can damage romantic relationships and indirectly raise the likelihood of engaging in infidelity-related behaviors on social media.

Finally, problematic internet usage (PIU) can intensify the risk of SMIRB by promoting excessive involvement in online activities. Overuse of social media can drastically reduce the time family members spend together, as addicts may constantly check their smartphones and skim content instead of engaging in shared activities or conversations (Yasmine, 2023). As individuals become increasingly absorbed in online environments, opportunities for infidelity-related behaviors grow.

In sum, the expanding digital landscape underscores the importance of understanding how social media features contribute to the darker aspects of romantic relationships. The interplay between psychological factors, relational dynamics, and technology-driven behaviors highlights the need for deeper examination of SMIRB. As social media continues to shape interpersonal connections, exploring its potential to undermine relationship fidelity becomes crucial for researchers, practitioners, and couples navigating modern communication patterns.



1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rise of social media has reshaped interpersonal communication, but it has also created new digital environments that may facilitate behaviors threatening romantic commitment. Recent studies indicate that social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)—including secretive messaging, emotional closeness with alternative partners, and online flirtation—are increasingly common and are linked to relationship dissatisfaction, secrecy, and emotional strain (McDaniel et al., 2017; Şerban et al., 2022). Although relationship problems linked to Facebook and other social networking platforms, including infidelity, are increasingly recognized, empirical research specifically addressing infidelity-related behaviors within social networking sites remains limited, as existing studies have largely focused on internet sexuality and generalized forms of online infidelity rather than social media-specific contexts (Cravens & Whiting, 2014).

First, although technological and psychological predictors of SMIRB have been studied independently, few investigations have examined how these variables interact within the same framework. Research confirms that Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) and problematic internet usage (PIU) are associated with higher tendencies to engage in online infidelity, yet it is still unclear how these technology-driven factors operate alongside psychological characteristics such as attachment anxiety (AA) and Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), which may increase vulnerability to seeking attention or intimacy online (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025; Şerban et al., 2022).

Second, while some studies link sexual dissatisfaction to various forms of offline infidelity, limited work has explored how reduced sexual satisfaction may interact with social media features to increase participation in SMIRB. This is particularly relevant because dissatisfaction in physical intimacy can heighten the likelihood of seeking emotional or sexual fulfillment through online environments, yet empirical understanding of this process remains limited (González-Rivera et al., 2019; Şerban et al., 2022).

Third, although previous research has shown negative associations between SNS addiction, SMIRB, and relationship well-being, the combined influence of psychological



vulnerabilities, relational dissatisfaction, and technology-based habits is still poorly understood. Studies highlight that SMIRB and Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA) can occur independently, but their interactive effects on relational outcomes—such as satisfaction or distress—remain unclear. Moreover, questions persist about whether SMIRB may intensify or weaken the relationship between Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA) and relationship functioning, indicating the need for more precise models (Abbasi & Dibble, 2025).

Overall, the literature lacks an integrated examination of Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) as simultaneous predictors of SMIRB. Without a comprehensive approach, the field cannot fully explain how social media features interact with individual and relational vulnerabilities to increase the risk of infidelity-related behaviors online. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by developing a unified model that examines the combined influence of psychological, relational, and technology-driven factors on SMIRB within the context of modern digital communication.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The widespread influence of social media has reshaped how individuals communicate and maintain intimacy, yet these same platforms increasingly expose romantic partners to behaviors that can undermine commitment. As digital features such as private messaging, algorithmic content suggestions, and constant connectivity become embedded in daily life, concerns have emerged regarding the rise of social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB). Prior research shows that SMIRB is associated with secrecy, declining relationship satisfaction, and heightened emotional strain (McDaniel et al., 2017; Şerban et al., 2022). However, understanding why individuals engage in these behaviors requires examining the psychological, relational, and technological factors that interact within digital environments.

Recent studies suggest that social media addiction can intensify users' engagement with online platforms, increasing opportunities for inappropriate connections or emotional involvement with alternative partners (Abbasi & Dibble, 2025; Abbasi, 2019). Similarly, psychological tendencies such as attachment anxiety (AA) may drive



individuals to seek reassurance or validation online, potentially heightening the risk of crossing relational boundaries (McDaniel et al., 2017). Emotional factors like ambivalence, characterized by mixed or conflicting feelings toward one's partner, may further increase susceptibility to online intimacy and attention-seeking behaviors (González-Rivera et al., 2019).

Relational dynamics also play an important role. Lower sexual satisfaction can lead partners to look beyond their relationship for emotional or sexual fulfillment, and social media provides an accessible alternative for such interactions (González-Rivera et al., 2019). Additionally, problematic internet usage (PIU) may encourage excessive or compulsive online engagement, increasing exposure to situations that promote SMIRB (Șerban et al., 2022). Although these factors have been examined separately in prior studies, there is limited research integrating them into a comprehensive framework to explain how SMIRB develops.

Given the complexity of digital behavior and its implications for modern relationships, it is essential to investigate how these psychological, relational, and technology-driven variables jointly influence SMIRB. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question:

How do Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) influence Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB)?

1.4. SIGNIFICANT OF THE STUDY

The rapid integration of social media into daily life has fundamentally transformed how romantic partners communicate, interact, and maintain intimacy. While social networking sites (SNSs) offer opportunities for connection and self-expression, their interactive and persistent features also create conditions that may encourage infidelity-related behaviors. Prior research indicates that excessive engagement with social media is associated with reduced relational intimacy, weakened trust, and lower relationship satisfaction, highlighting the potential relational risks embedded in digital environments (Andreassen et al., 2012; McDaniel & Coyne, 2017). Despite these concerns, the mechanisms through which specific psychological and behavioral factors



interact with social media features to promote social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) remain insufficiently understood. So, this study is important because it will fill this gap.

This study is significant because it advances existing literature by examining the combined influence of Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) and problematic internet usage (PIU) on SMIRB. Addictive patterns of social media use often involve compulsive checking, emotional dependence, and blurred interpersonal boundaries, which can increase vulnerability to secretive or emotionally intimate online interactions outside primary relationships (Andreassen et al., 2012; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025). By addressing these patterns together, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how digital overuse intensifies relational risks in contemporary romantic partnerships.

In addition, this research contributes theoretically by incorporating key attachment-related and emotional factors, including attachment anxiety (AA) and Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), into the study of online infidelity. Individuals with higher attachment anxiety may seek reassurance, validation, or emotional closeness through online interactions, while ambivalence can weaken commitment clarity and increase susceptibility to boundary violations on social media platforms (McDaniel & Coyne, 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019). Examining these factors together clarifies why some individuals are more prone to engaging in SMIRB despite being in committed relationships.

The study is also significant in highlighting the role of Sexual Satisfaction (SS) in the digital infidelity context. Lower sexual satisfaction has been linked to increased likelihood of seeking alternative forms of intimacy or validation, which social media readily facilitates through private messaging and interactive features (González-Rivera et al., 2019). By situating sexual satisfaction within the broader digital ecosystem, this research helps explain how unmet relational needs may translate into online infidelity-related behaviors rather than traditional offline affairs.

From a broader perspective, this study addresses critical empirical gaps by responding to calls for more nuanced investigations of online infidelity as a distinct relational phenomenon shaped by technology-specific affordances (Helsper & Whitty, 2010;



Carter, 2016). Understanding SMIRB as a unique outcome of social media environments is essential, as digital interactions can produce relational harm comparable to offline infidelity, including jealousy, conflict, and emotional distress (McDaniel & Coyne, 2017).

Finally, the findings of this study offer practical significance for relationship counseling, digital well-being interventions, and future research. By identifying how Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), attachment anxiety (AA), Relationship ambivalence (RAMB), sexual satisfaction (SS), and problematic internet usage (PIU) jointly contribute to SMIRB, the study provides evidence-based insights that can inform prevention strategies and promote healthier technology use within romantic relationships. As social media continues to shape intimate life, such evidence is essential for safeguarding relationship stability and psychological well-being in the digital age.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THE DARK SIDE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Advances in digital technology have fundamentally reshaped patterns of communication, social interaction, and relationship formation. Social media platforms, in particular, have become deeply embedded in everyday life, offering users opportunities for instant connection, self-presentation, and information exchange across geographical boundaries (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While these platforms provide numerous social and psychological benefits, scholars increasingly highlight the unintended negative consequences associated with excessive or unregulated technology use, a perspective commonly referred to as the *dark side of technology* (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Salanova et al., 2013).

Research suggests that specific technological affordances of social media—such as constant accessibility, perceived anonymity, persistence of digital content, and asynchronous communication—may disrupt interpersonal boundaries and alter relational norms (De Wachter, 2015; McFarland, & Ployhart, 2015). These features allow users to maintain parallel social interactions, conceal online activities, and engage in emotionally intimate exchanges with minimal immediate accountability. As a result, Social networking sites (SNSs) use has been linked to increased relational conflict, reduced face-to-face intimacy, jealousy erosion within close relationships (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

Within romantic contexts, scholars argue that social media technologies create unique conditions that blur the boundaries between acceptable interaction and relational transgression (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2011). Unlike traditional offline interactions, online communication enables private, continuous, and emotionally charged exchanges that may gradually evolve into infidelity-related behaviors without clear behavioral markers (Cravens & Whiting, 2014). Consequently, social media has facilitated new forms of relational risk, including emotional displacement, secrecy, and ambiguous interactions with alternative partners. These dynamics have contributed to the growing recognition of



social media infidelity-related behaviors as a distinct and increasingly prevalent relational phenomenon in contemporary intimate relationships (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019).

2.2.SOCIAL MEDIA INFIDELITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

The increasing integration of social media into daily life has fundamentally altered how romantic partners interact with others outside their primary relationships. Within this digital context, scholars have introduced the concept of social media infidelity-related behaviors to describe a range of online interactions that challenge relational boundaries and expectations. These behaviors encompass emotionally intimate, sexually suggestive, ambiguous, or deceptive interactions conducted via social networking platforms that violate explicit agreements or implicit norms of exclusivity within romantic relationships (McDaniel et al., 2017; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025).

Unlike traditional forms of infidelity, which are often defined by physical or sexual involvement, online infidelity is characterized by its symbolic, emotional, and communicative nature, making it inherently ambiguous and difficult to delineate (Henline et al., 2007; Hertlein & Piercy, 2008). Social media platforms enable private, persistent, and continuous communication, allowing interactions with alternative partners to develop gradually without immediate physical contact (Wilson et al., 2011). As a result, individuals may engage in behaviors they do not explicitly label as infidelity, despite their potential to threaten relational trust and commitment.

Researchers commonly distinguish between explicit, ambiguous, and misleading infidelity-related behaviors. Explicit behaviors include overt sexual exchanges such as sexting or sharing explicit images. Ambiguous behaviors involve emotionally intimate interactions, private messaging, or frequent engagement that lacks overt sexual content but may still violate relational expectations. Misleading behaviors include secrecy, concealment, and the deliberate management of online self-presentation to avoid partner awareness (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that ambiguous and misleading behaviors are particularly prevalent due to their perceived social acceptability and deniability in digital environments (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019).



Engagement in social media infidelity-related behaviors has been consistently associated with negative relational outcomes, including reduced trust, heightened jealousy, emotional distance, and lower relationship satisfaction (Elphinston & Noller, 2011; McDaniel et al., 2017; Muise et al., 2009). These behaviors may function as precursors to offline infidelity or as independent relational stressors that erode emotional security over time. Consequently, social media infidelity-related behaviors have emerged as a critical dependent variable in contemporary relationship research, reflecting the complex ways in which digital technologies reshape intimacy, fidelity, and commitment in modern romantic relationships.

2.3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE INFIDELITY

Engagement in online infidelity-related behaviors has been examined through multiple theoretical lenses that emphasize the interaction between individual vulnerabilities, relational dynamics, and technological affordances. Rather than emerging from a single cause, online infidelity is increasingly understood as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by psychological needs, relationship processes, and the structural characteristics of digital communication environments.

Attachment theory provides a foundational framework for understanding why certain individuals are more susceptible to infidelity-related behaviors in online contexts. According to this perspective, early relational experiences shape internal working models of intimacy, trust, and availability of others (Bowlby, 2008). Individuals with insecure attachment orientations—particularly those high in attachment anxiety—tend to exhibit heightened fear of abandonment, excessive reassurance-seeking, and emotional hyperactivation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). In digital environments, these individuals may be especially drawn to social media interactions that offer immediate validation, emotional closeness, and perceived safety, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in emotionally intimate or ambiguous online behaviors with alternative partners (Fox, & Warber, 2014; Jin, & Pena, 2010).

The Investment Model of Commitment further explains online infidelity by emphasizing the role of relationship satisfaction, investment, and perceived alternatives (Rusbult et al., 2011). According to this model, individuals who experience low satisfaction or weakened commitment are more likely to attend to alternative partners, particularly



when perceived costs of engagement are low. Social media platforms amplify the availability and visibility of alternatives, lowering psychological barriers to interaction and facilitating gradual boundary crossings that may evolve into infidelity-related behaviors (Rusbult et al., 2011; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017). Thus, online infidelity can be understood as a consequence of diminished commitment combined with increased access to relational alternatives.

In addition, Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights the active role of individuals in selecting media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs (Katz et al., 1973). From this perspective, social media is used to fulfill needs for companionship, sexual interest, self-esteem, and emotional support. When these needs are inadequately met within primary relationships, individuals may turn to online interactions as compensatory outlets, increasing the risk of infidelity-related behaviors (Stafford et al., 2004; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025). This framework is particularly relevant in explaining how technological features interact with unmet relational needs to facilitate boundary violations.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives underscore that online infidelity-related behaviors arise from the interplay between individual attachment vulnerabilities, relationship-level commitment processes, and media-driven gratification-seeking. Integrating these frameworks provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding how psychological predispositions and social media affordances converge to influence infidelity-related behaviors in contemporary romantic relationships.

2.4.SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ADDICTION (SNSA) AND INFIDELITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) has emerged as a significant behavioral concern in the digital era, reflecting a pattern of excessive and compulsive engagement with social networking platforms that interferes with daily functioning and interpersonal relationships. Drawing on behavioral addiction frameworks, Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) is commonly characterized by symptoms such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse, which mirror those observed in other non-substance-related addictions (Andreassen et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2005; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). These addictive patterns are reinforced by platform features



such as intermittent rewards, social validation, and continuous connectivity, which encourage prolonged and repetitive use (Montag et al., 2019; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Alter, 2018).

Within romantic relationships, excessive Social networking sites use has been consistently linked to relational strain. High levels of using Social networking sites are associated with reduced face-to-face interaction, emotional disengagement, and neglect of partner needs, a phenomenon often described as *technoference* (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Partners may experience feelings of jealousy, exclusion, and dissatisfaction as social media competes with relational time and attention (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Moreover, compulsive Social networking sites (SNSs) use often involves increased privacy management, such as password protection or concealed online interactions, which can foster secrecy and erode relational trust.

Empirical research indicates that Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) may directly and indirectly facilitate infidelity-related behaviors. Addictive use increases exposure to alternative partners and lowers psychological barriers to initiating online interactions, particularly in environments that normalize casual communication and flirtation (Abbasi, 2019). As individuals spend more time engaging with Social networking sites, opportunities for emotionally intimate or sexually suggestive exchanges expand, increasing the likelihood of boundary violations (McDaniel et al., 2017; Cravens & Whiting, 2014). Furthermore, the cognitive preoccupation associated with addiction may weaken self-regulation and commitment to relational norms, making individuals more susceptible to infidelity-related behaviors.

Overall, the literature suggests that Social networking sites addiction functions as both a contextual and psychological risk factor for online infidelity. By intensifying exposure to alternatives, reducing relational presence, and undermining self-control, addictive social media use creates conditions conducive to emotional displacement and relational transgression. Consequently, Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA) represents a critical predictor of social media infidelity-related behaviors in contemporary romantic relationships.



2.5. ATTACHMENT ANXIETY (AA) AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFIDELITY

Attachment anxiety is a central dimension of insecure attachment characterized by fear of abandonment, excessive need for reassurance, and heightened sensitivity to perceived relational threats (Bowlby, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Individuals high in attachment anxiety (AA) tend to engage in hyperactivating strategies, such as intensified proximity-seeking and emotional monitoring, particularly when they perceive uncertainty or unresponsiveness from their romantic partners. These attachment-related vulnerabilities make anxiously attached individuals especially sensitive to relational cues and highly motivated to seek validation and emotional security.

In digital environments, social media platforms provide readily accessible opportunities for reassurance-seeking and emotional connection. Features such as immediate feedback, visibility of social approval, and private messaging can be particularly appealing to anxiously attached individuals, who may turn to online interactions to regulate attachment-related distress (Jin & Peña, 2010; Fox & Warber, 2014; Hart et al., 2015). When perceived support or responsiveness from a primary partner is insufficient, online communication with alternative partners may function as a compensatory strategy, increasing the likelihood of emotionally intimate or ambiguous interactions.

A growing body of empirical research links attachment anxiety (AA) to online infidelity-related behaviors. Studies indicate that individuals with higher attachment anxiety (AA) are more likely to engage in emotional infidelity, online flirting, excessive monitoring of alternative partners, and secrecy regarding online interactions (Abbasi, 2019). These behaviors are often motivated by a desire for reassurance and fear of relational loss rather than deliberate intent to violate relational norms. However, despite these motivations, such behaviors can undermine trust and exacerbate relational instability over time.

Furthermore, attachment anxiety (AA) may interact with technological affordances to amplify infidelity risk. The constant availability of social media allows anxiously attached individuals to maintain continuous contact with multiple sources of validation, potentially reducing reliance on primary relationships for emotional security (McDaniel



et al., 2017). As a result, attachment anxiety represents a significant psychological vulnerability that increases susceptibility to social media infidelity-related behaviors, particularly in contexts of relational uncertainty or dissatisfaction.

2.6. RELATIONSHIP AMBIVALENCE (RAMB) AND INFIDELITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

Relationship ambivalence (RAMB) is a complex relational state characterized by the simultaneous experience of positive and negative thoughts, emotions, and evaluations toward a romantic partner (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998). Rather than reflecting simple dissatisfaction, ambivalence involves uncertainty, emotional conflict, and difficulty committing to a clear relational stance. This psychological tension can destabilize relationships by weakening emotional clarity and undermining long-term commitment, thereby increasing vulnerability to relational transgressions.

From a relational decision-making perspective, ambivalence reduces the motivational forces that typically inhibit attention to alternative partners. Individuals experiencing mixed feelings toward their partners may maintain emotional openness to other relational possibilities as a way of managing uncertainty or testing relational alternatives (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). In digital environments, social media platforms facilitate this process by providing low-cost, socially acceptable opportunities to explore alternative connections without immediate consequences, thereby amplifying the effects of ambivalence (Davis, 2012).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that relationship ambivalence is associated with infidelity-related behaviors on social media (SMIRB), particularly ambiguous and misleading interactions. These behaviors include private messaging, emotional disclosure, and concealment of online activities, which allow individuals to maintain relational alternatives while avoiding overt commitment violations (González-Rivera et al., 2019). Because such behaviors are often perceived as less severe than explicit sexual infidelity, they may be more easily rationalized by ambivalent individuals.

Furthermore, research suggests that ambivalence frequently operates as a mediating mechanism linking relationship dissatisfaction, insecurity, and online infidelity-related behaviors. When individuals experience unmet emotional or relational needs,



ambivalence may emerge, increasing openness to external validation and alternative partners through social media interactions (González-Rivera et al., 2019). Over time, persistent ambivalence can erode trust and emotional security, making infidelity-related behaviors more likely to escalate.

Overall, relationship ambivalence (RAMB) represents a critical relational vulnerability in the digital age. By weakening commitment and increasing openness to alternative relational options, ambivalence plays a significant role in facilitating social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) and warrants focused attention in contemporary relationship research.

2.7. SEXUAL SATISFACTION (SS) AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFIDELITY

Sexual satisfaction (SS) is widely recognized as a fundamental dimension of relationship quality and a key predictor of relational stability, commitment, and overall well-being within romantic partnerships (Heiman et al., 2011). It reflects the extent to which individuals perceive their sexual relationship as fulfilling, rewarding, and congruent with their expectations and desires. High levels of sexual satisfaction (SS) are associated with greater emotional closeness, trust, and commitment, whereas sexual dissatisfaction often contributes to relational strain and emotional disengagement.

A substantial body of research indicates that low sexual satisfaction (SS) is linked to reduced commitment and increased attention to alternative partners. According to interdependence and investment-based perspectives, unmet sexual needs weaken the rewards derived from a relationship, thereby increasing the perceived attractiveness of relational alternatives (Drigotas et al., 1999). Over time, persistent sexual dissatisfaction may foster emotional distancing, ambivalence, and decreased motivation to adhere to exclusivity norms.

In contemporary digital environments, social media platforms provide accessible and socially acceptable avenues for seeking sexual or emotional gratification outside the primary relationship. Online interactions allow individuals to explore intimacy, flirtation, and validation with minimal immediate risk or accountability. Empirical studies demonstrate that individuals experiencing sexual dissatisfaction are more likely to



engage in emotionally intimate conversations, online flirting, and sexually suggestive exchanges on social media, behaviors that are closely associated with infidelity-related outcomes (González-Rivera et al., 2019; Şerban et al., 2022).

Furthermore, social media may function as a compensatory mechanism for unmet sexual or emotional needs. Through likes, comments, private messaging, and sexting, individuals can obtain affirmation and sexual validation that may be lacking in their primary relationship. Although such interactions may initially appear harmless, repeated engagement can gradually erode relational boundaries and increase the risk of emotional or sexual infidelity (Cravens, 2013). Consequently, sexual dissatisfaction represents a significant relational risk factor that contributes to the emergence of social media infidelity-related behaviors.

2.8. PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USAGE (PIU) AND INFIDELITY-RELATED BEHAVIORS

Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) refers to patterns of excessive, compulsive, or poorly regulated online behavior that result in psychological distress, impaired daily functioning, and disruptions in interpersonal relationships (Davis, 2001). Unlike general or high-frequency internet use, PIU is characterized by loss of control, preoccupation with online activities, and continued engagement despite negative consequences. Contemporary models conceptualize PIU as a maladaptive coping strategy driven by underlying psychological vulnerabilities rather than mere technological exposure (Caplan, 2010).

Individuals exhibiting problematic internet usage often experience difficulties in emotional regulation, impulse control, and interpersonal functioning. The preference for online social interaction, a key component of PIU, reflects the tendency to perceive online environments as safer, less threatening, and more controllable than offline interactions (Caplan, 2010). As a result, individuals may increasingly rely on digital communication to manage stress, loneliness, or dissatisfaction, while avoiding direct engagement with relational challenges in their primary relationships.

Empirical research indicates that problematic internet usage is associated with increased exposure to risky online interactions and diminished relational presence.



Excessive time spent online reduces opportunities for face-to-face communication, emotional intimacy, and relationship maintenance, thereby weakening relational bonds (Elphinston, & Noller, 2011). In romantic contexts, PIU has been linked to secrecy, emotional withdrawal, and increased susceptibility to online flirtation and emotionally intimate exchanges with alternative partners (Şerban et al., 2022).

Moreover, the structural characteristics of the internet—such as anonymity, accessibility, and continuous availability—amplify the risks associated with problematic Internet usage (PIU). These features lower social and psychological barriers to engaging in infidelity-related behaviors by facilitating private communication, rapid escalation of intimacy, and concealment of online activities (Şerban et al., 2022). Over time, problematic internet usage may function as a pathway through which relational dissatisfaction and psychological vulnerabilities translate into social media infidelity-related behaviors.

Overall, the literature suggests that problematic internet usage (PIU) represents a significant contextual and psychological risk factor for online infidelity. By fostering avoidance of offline relational engagement, impairing self-regulation, and increasing exposure to alternative partners, PIU contributes to the likelihood of engaging in infidelity-related behaviors on social media platforms.



Table 1 – Literature review findings

Independent Variable (IV)	Key Finding	Dependent Variable (DV)	Sources
Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA)	Excessive social networking site use (SNSA) can directly and indirectly increase the likelihood of infidelity-related behaviors by exposing individuals to alternative partners and reducing psychological barriers to online interactions	SMIRB	Abbasi, 2019
Attachment Anxiety (AA)	Attachment anxiety (AA) increases vulnerability to social media infidelity-related behaviors, as anxiously attached individuals use the constant availability of social media to seek continuous validation, reducing reliance on primary relationships	SMIRB	McDaniel et al., 2017
Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB)	Relationship ambivalence increases the likelihood of social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB), as ambivalent individuals engage in private, emotional, or concealed online interactions to maintain alternative connections without overtly violating commitment	SMIRB	González-Rivera et al., 2019



Sexual Satisfaction (SS)	Social media offers individuals experiencing sexual dissatisfaction a convenient and low-risk way to seek emotional or sexual gratification, increasing engagement in online behaviors linked to infidelity	SMIRB	González-Rivera et al., 2019
Problematic Internet Usage (PIU)	The structural features of the internet— anonymity, constant accessibility, and ease of use—intensify the risks of problematic internet usage (PIU) by enabling private, rapid, and concealed interactions, which can transform relational dissatisfaction and psychological vulnerabilities into social media infidelity-related behaviors	SMIRB	Şerban et al., 2022



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

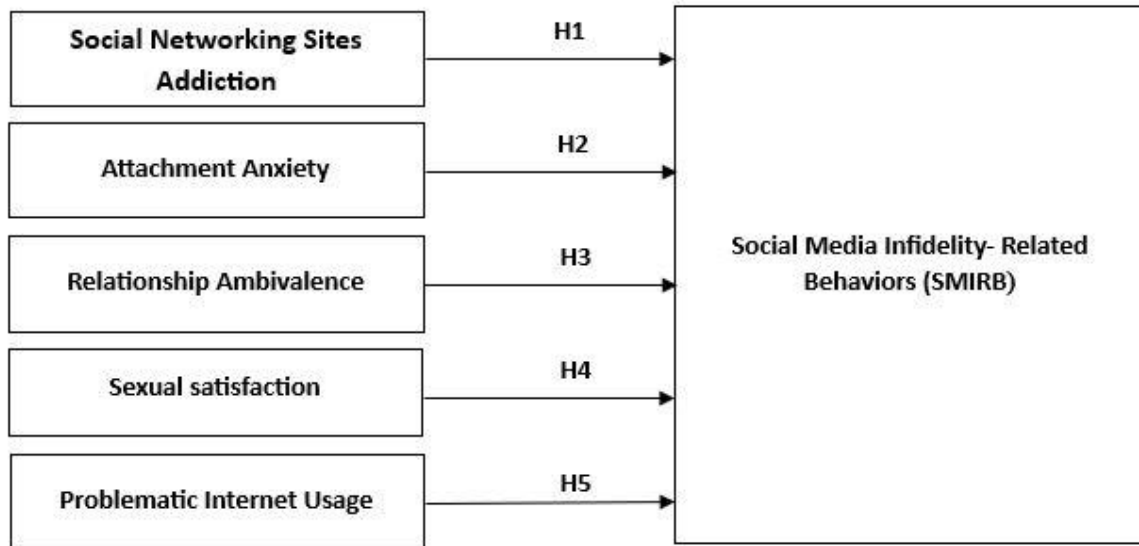


Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework

This research model examines the influence of five critical psychosocial and behavioral factors—Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), attachment anxiety (AA), relationship ambivalence (RAMB), sexual satisfaction (SS), and problematic internet usage (PIU)—on social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB). Grounded in contemporary relationship and technology research, the framework conceptualizes social media infidelity-related behaviors as a multifaceted outcome shaped by both individual vulnerabilities and technology-enabled interaction patterns.

The proposed conceptual framework is informed by recent empirical and theoretical work on digital intimacy, behavioral addiction, attachment processes, and online relational transgressions (Abbasi & Dibble, 2025; McDaniel et al., 2017; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014). Specifically, the model hypothesizes that social networking sites addiction (H1), attachment anxiety (H2), relationship ambivalence (H3), sexual satisfaction (H4) and problematic internet usage (H5) each exert a positive and direct effect on social media infidelity-related behaviors.



Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) refers to compulsive and excessive engagement with social networking platforms characterized by salience, mood modification, loss of control, and interpersonal conflict, which may increase exposure to alternative partners and weaken relational boundaries (Andreassen, 2015). Attachment anxiety reflects heightened fears of abandonment and a strong need for reassurance, which may motivate individuals to seek emotional validation and intimacy through online interactions outside their primary relationship (McDaniel et al., 2017; Fox & Warber, 2014). Relationship ambivalence (RAMB) denotes the coexistence of positive and negative feelings toward a romantic partner, a state that may reduce commitment clarity and increase openness to alternative relational possibilities facilitated by social media environments (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019).

In contrast, sexual satisfaction (SS) represents the degree to which individuals feel fulfilled with their sexual relationship and is conceptualized as a protective factor. Lower levels of sexual satisfaction may diminish relational rewards and increase susceptibility to emotionally or sexually suggestive online interactions (McNulty et al., 2016; González-Rivera et al., 2019). Problematic internet usage (PIU) involves poorly regulated and excessive online behavior that disrupts daily functioning and interpersonal relationships, thereby increasing opportunities for private communication, secrecy, and boundary violations in digital contexts (Caplan, 2010; Abbasi & Dibble, 2025).

Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the conceptual model aims to test and quantify the strength of these hypothesized relationships and to identify which factors most strongly predict engagement in social media infidelity-related behaviors. By integrating psychological predispositions with technology-related behaviors, this framework provides a comprehensive explanation of how the dark side of social media features contributes to infidelity-related outcomes in contemporary romantic relationships.



3.2. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

A hypothesis represents a theoretically grounded and empirically informed proposition that predicts the relationship between key study variables (Islam, 2025). In research examining technology-mediated relationship behaviors, hypotheses play a central role in explaining how individual vulnerabilities and digital environments interact to shape relational outcomes (McDaniel, & Drouin, 2019). In line with this purpose, the present study develops five hypotheses to examine the effects of Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), attachment anxiety (AA), relationship ambivalence (RAMB), sexual satisfaction (SS), and problematic internet usage (PIU) on social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) (González-Rivera et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2017; Șerban et al., 2022; Abbasi, & Dibble, 2025; Abbasi, 2019).

3.2.1 Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) and social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)

Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) is characterized by compulsive engagement with social networking platforms, difficulty regulating usage, and continued involvement despite negative interpersonal consequences. Prior research indicates that excessive Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) use increases exposure to alternative partners, encourages private interactions, and weakens relational boundaries, thereby elevating the risk of infidelity-related behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Abbasi, & Dibble, 2025; Abbasi, 2019). Individuals who exhibit addictive patterns of social media use are more likely to engage in emotionally intimate or sexually suggestive online exchanges that may violate relationship norms. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) (Abbasi, & Dibble, 2025; Abbasi, 2019).

3.2.2 Attachment anxiety (AA) and social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)

Attachment anxiety reflects heightened fear of abandonment, strong reassurance-seeking tendencies, and sensitivity to relational threats. In digital contexts, anxiously attached individuals may be particularly drawn to social media features that provide



immediate feedback, emotional validation, and private communication channels (McDaniel et al., 2017; Fox & Warber, 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that attachment anxiety predicts online flirting, emotional infidelity, partner surveillance, and secrecy in social media use (Fox & Warber, 2014). Therefore, individuals with higher attachment anxiety are expected to be more vulnerable to social media infidelity-related behaviors.

H2: Attachment anxiety (AA) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) (McDaniel et al., 2017).

3.2.3 Relationship ambivalence (RAMB) and social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)

Relationship ambivalence refers to the simultaneous presence of positive and negative evaluations toward a romantic partner, resulting in relational uncertainty and weakened commitment clarity. Studies indicate that ambivalence reduces motivational barriers that typically discourage attention to alternative partners and increases openness to other relational possibilities (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019). Social media platforms further facilitate this process by offering low-cost and socially acceptable opportunities to explore alternative connections without immediate consequences. As a result, individuals experiencing relational ambivalence may be more likely to engage in ambiguous or misleading online behaviors that precede infidelity.

H3: Relationship ambivalence (RAMB) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) (McDaniel et al., 2017; González-Rivera et al., 2019).

3.2.4 Sexual satisfaction (SS) and social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)

Sexual satisfaction is a fundamental dimension of relationship quality and plays a critical role in maintaining commitment and relational stability. Lower levels of sexual satisfaction have been associated with diminished relational rewards and increased interest in alternative partners (McNulty et al., 2016; González-Rivera et al., 2019). In digital environments, individuals experiencing sexual dissatisfaction may seek emotional or sexual validation through social media interactions, which can gradually



escalate into infidelity-related behaviors. Therefore, sexual satisfaction is conceptualized as a protective factor against social media infidelity.

H4: Sexual satisfaction (SS) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) (González-Rivera et al., 2019).

3.2.5 Problematic internet usage and social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB)

Problematic internet usage (PIU) involves excessive and poorly regulated online behavior that interferes with daily functioning and interpersonal relationships. Individuals with problematic internet usage often prefer online social interaction due to its perceived safety, anonymity, and controllability (Caplan, 2010; Şerban et al., 2022). These characteristics facilitate private communication, concealment, and rapid escalation of online intimacy, thereby increasing vulnerability to infidelity-related behaviors (Abbasi & Dibble, 2025; McDaniel et al., 2017). Consequently, problematic internet usage is expected to be a significant predictor of social media infidelity-related behaviors.

H5: Problematic internet usage (PIU) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors (Şerban et al., 2022).



4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a structured research design aimed at examining how specific technology-related and psychological factors contribute to social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) within romantic relationships. Guided by the thesis titled *“The Dark Side of Technology: The Role of Social Media Features on Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors,”* the primary objective of the research is to assess the effects of Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), attachment anxiety (AA), relationship ambivalence (RAMB), sexual satisfaction (SS), and problematic internet usage (PIU) on individuals’ engagement in infidelity-related behaviors through social media platforms.

Given the sensitive and multifaceted nature of online relational transgressions, the study employs a quantitative research approach, which enables the systematic measurement and statistical evaluation of relationships between multiple independent variables and a single dependent variable. Quantitative research is particularly appropriate when the goal is to test theoretically derived hypotheses and examine the strength and direction of associations using standardized measurement instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the five identified factors function as independent variables, while social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB) serve as the dependent variable.

Data are collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire to ensure consistency, objectivity, and comparability of responses. Due to practical constraints related to time, accessibility, and resources, the study relies on a representative but limited sample, which is considered acceptable for theory testing in behavioral and social science research. This design allows for efficient data collection while maintaining adequate statistical power for model estimation (McGrath, 1995).

To analyze the proposed relationships, the study utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for this research because it supports predictive analysis, accommodates complex models with multiple latent constructs, and performs well with non-normal data distributions and



moderate sample sizes (Hair, 2014). By applying PLS-SEM, the study seeks to quantify the relative influence of each predictor and identify the most salient contributors to social media infidelity-related behaviors.

Overall, this research design integrates psychological predispositions and technology-use behaviors within a robust quantitative framework, providing a systematic approach to understanding how the darker features of social media environments shape contemporary romantic relationship outcomes.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

For this study, data were collected using a non-probability convenience sampling strategy, targeting individuals who actively use social media platforms and are currently involved in, or have experience with, romantic relationships. This approach was deemed appropriate given the exploratory and behavior-focused nature of the research, as well as practical constraints related to time and accessibility. To broaden participation, the survey was disseminated online via email to university students and further expanded through a snowball sampling technique, allowing respondents to share the questionnaire within their social networks and thereby increasing sample reach (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

The study adopted a quantitative survey-based method to systematically examine relationships among the proposed variables. Quantitative research is particularly suitable for testing hypotheses and identifying patterns among constructs through numerical data and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Online surveys were selected due to their efficiency, anonymity, and suitability for sensitive topics such as infidelity-related behaviors, which may be underreported in face-to-face data collection contexts (Gnambs, & Kaspar, 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2014; Coutts, & Jann, 2011).

The questionnaire was specifically developed to measure the relationships between the independent variables—social networking sites addiction, attachment anxiety, relationship ambivalence, sexual satisfaction, and problematic internet usage—and the dependent variable, social media infidelity-related behaviors. All measurement items were adapted from validated scales commonly used in prior empirical studies to



ensure content validity and conceptual alignment with the research hypotheses (González-Rivera et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2017; Şerban et al., 2022; Abbasi, & Dibble, 2025; Abbasi, 2019). Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, anonymity of responses, and their right to withdraw at any stage before providing informed consent.

Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted with a small subset of respondents to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and internal consistency of the measurement instruments. Feedback from the pilot phase indicated that the questionnaire items were understandable and appropriately worded, though minor linguistic refinements were made to enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity. The finalized survey was then administered over a one-month period through online platforms, ensuring sufficient time to capture diverse responses from social media users.

This structured data collection approach provided a reliable foundation for subsequent analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is well suited for examining complex relationships involving multiple latent constructs and moderate sample sizes (Hair, 2014).

4.3. MEASUREMENT

To measure participants' perceptions and behaviors, this study employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *5 = strongly agree*. Likert-type scales are widely used in behavioral and social science research because they allow respondents to express varying degrees of agreement and intensity of attitudes (Joshi et al., 2015). Prior methodological research suggests that seven-point scales offer greater response variability and improved statistical performance, particularly in complex multivariate analyses such as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Revilla et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2019). Given the predictive and exploratory nature of the present study, the seven-point scale was deemed appropriate for capturing nuanced variations in social media use and relational behaviors.



All measurement items were adapted from well-established and empirically validated scales, with wording slightly refined to reflect the context of social media use within romantic relationships. The constructs were operationalized as follows:

- Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) was measured using items adapted from the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, which conceptualizes addiction through salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse in social media usage (Andreassen et al., 2012). This scale has been widely applied to assess problematic and compulsive engagement with social networking platforms.
- Attachment Anxiety (AA) was assessed using items adapted from the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R) short form, focusing on fears of abandonment, excessive need for reassurance, and hyperactivation of attachment behaviors (Wei et al., 2007). The scale captures individual differences in attachment-related anxiety within romantic contexts.
- Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) was measured using items adapted from relational ambivalence research that conceptualizes ambivalence as the coexistence of positive and negative evaluations toward a romantic partner (Booth et al., 1983; Braiker & Kelley, 1979). The items reflect mixed emotions, uncertainty, and conflicting relationship evaluations.
- Sexual Satisfaction (SS) was measured using adapted items from the Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction, which emphasizes satisfaction derived from perceived rewards and fulfillment within sexual aspects of romantic relationships (González-Rivera et al., 2017).
- Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) was assessed using indicators adapted from contemporary problematic internet use frameworks that emphasize compulsive use, loss of control, and negative consequences in daily and relational functioning (Koronczai et al. 2011).



- Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB), the dependent variable, were measured using items adapted from studies examining emotionally intimate, secretive, and sexually suggestive interactions conducted via social media outside a primary romantic relationship (McDaniel et al., 2017; Abbasi & Dibble, 2021).

All measurement items were reviewed for clarity and contextual relevance and were pre-tested through a pilot study. Minor wording adjustments were made to ensure comprehension and alignment with the study's objectives. The final measurement model was deemed suitable for assessing the proposed relationships among constructs in the structural model.

4.4. RELIABILITY TEST

Reliability refers to the degree to which a measurement instrument consistently reflects the construct it is intended to assess (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In survey-based research involving psychological and behavioral constructs—such as Social Networking Sites Addiction, Attachment Anxiety, Ambivalence, Sexual Satisfaction, Problematic Internet Usage, and Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors—it is essential to confirm that items within each scale consistently measure the same underlying concept (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

A commonly employed indicator of internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha, which assesses how closely related a set of items are as a group (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; although older than 15 years, Tavakol & Dennick's explanation is sufficient for current purposes). Values of 0.70 or higher are generally accepted as demonstrating adequate reliability in social science research, while values above 0.80 are considered good (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019).

In the present study, separate reliability analyses were performed for each construct in the theoretical model. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the independent variables (Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU)) and for the dependent variable (Social Media Infidelity-Related



Behaviors (SMIRB)). Items that did not contribute to internal consistency—indicated by low item-total correlations or increases in alpha when deleted—were evaluated and, where conceptually justified, removed to improve scale reliability (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

Confirming satisfactory internal consistency is a critical prerequisite before conducting further analyses, as it ensures that the observed relationships among variables are not artifacts of measurement error (Hair et al., 2019; DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). By establishing that all scales met or exceeded the acceptable reliability threshold, this study strengthens the quality and interpretability of subsequent structural and inferential results.

4.5. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

This study applies multivariate data analysis techniques to examine the complex relationships between social media–related psychological and behavioral factors and Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB). Given the presence of multiple independent variables—namely Social Networking Sites Addiction, Attachment Anxiety, Ambivalence, Sexual Satisfaction, and Problematic Internet Usage—and a single dependent variable, a multivariate approach is appropriate for simultaneously assessing these interrelated constructs (Leguina, 2015).

To analyze the collected survey data, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is employed. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for this study because it enables the estimation of complex models involving multiple latent constructs and structural paths while accommodating non-normal data distributions and moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). This method is widely used in behavioral and technology-related research to explore predictive relationships and theory development, especially when the primary objective is to explain variance in the dependent variable.

In this research, PLS-SEM facilitates the simultaneous assessment of both the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model evaluation focuses on reliability and validity to ensure that the constructs of Social Networking Sites Addiction, Attachment Anxiety, Ambivalence, Sexual Satisfaction, Problematic



Internet Usage, and Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors are measured accurately. Subsequently, the structural model is assessed to test the hypothesized relationships and determine the magnitude and significance of the effects of the independent variables on infidelity-related behaviors in social media contexts (Hair et al., 2019).

The data analysis and hypothesis testing are conducted using SmartPLS software, which provides path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes, and predictive relevance indicators. These outputs are essential for evaluating the explanatory power of the model and understanding how specific social media-related factors contribute to infidelity-related behaviors (Hair et al., 2019). The use of PLS-SEM thus ensures a robust and systematic examination of the research model aligned with the objectives of this study.



5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

To examine the dark side of technology and its influence on Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB), data were collected through a structured online survey administered via the Qualtrics platform. The survey was conducted between 20th November and 24th December 2025 and targeted individuals who actively use social media platforms and are currently involved in or have prior experience with romantic relationships. This sampling strategy was adopted to ensure that respondents possessed relevant exposure to digital interactions within relational contexts.

A total of 202 valid responses were obtained and included in the final analysis. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with regular engagement in online communication environments where social media features such as private messaging, content sharing, and continuous connectivity are commonly used. This approach was appropriate for capturing behaviors and psychological tendencies associated with Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU).

The questionnaire consisted of standardized measurement scales designed to assess the five independent variables and their influence on the dependent variable, SMIRB. These constructs were selected based on prior empirical evidence highlighting their relevance in explaining maladaptive digital behaviors and relational boundary violations in online environments (Bata et al., 2018; Budde et al., 2022). Only fully completed questionnaires were retained to ensure data quality and reliability.

Overall, the data collection process was designed to capture respondents' psychological characteristics, relational experiences, and patterns of social media and internet use in a manner directly aligned with the study's objective. This sampling and data collection strategy supports the validity of the findings and provides an appropriate empirical foundation for analyzing how social media features interact with individual vulnerabilities to shape infidelity-related behaviors in digital contexts.



5.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic section of the questionnaire was designed to describe the background characteristics of respondents relevant to the investigation of social media infidelity-related behaviors (SMIRB). Information was collected on respondents' gender, age, education level, and occupational status, as these factors are closely associated with patterns of social media use, psychological vulnerability, and relationship experiences. Understanding these characteristics provides important context for interpreting the relationships between Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), Problematic Internet Usage (PIU), and SMIRB. The demographic distribution of respondents is summarized in Table 2 and explained in the following subsections.

5.2.1. GENDER

The gender distribution of the sample indicates a relatively balanced representation of respondents. Female participants formed the largest group, with 102 respondents (50.50%), followed by male respondents, who accounted for 94 individuals (46.53%). A small proportion of participants identified as non-binary or preferred not to disclose their gender, totaling 6 respondents (2.97%). This balanced gender composition is appropriate for examining social media infidelity-related behaviors, as prior research suggests that both men and women engage with social media features in distinct yet comparable relational contexts (Fox & Anderegg, 2014; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012).

5.2.2. AGE (YEARS)

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were within the 31–40 years age group, comprising 82 participants (40.59%). This was followed by respondents aged 18–30 years, representing 61 individuals (30.20%). Participants aged 41–50 years accounted for 34 respondents (16.83%), while those aged 51–60 years comprised 18 respondents (8.91%). The smallest age group consisted of respondents aged 61–65 years, totaling 7 individuals (3.47%). Overall, the age profile reflects a predominantly adult population actively engaged in social media use, a group



particularly relevant for examining relationship-related online behaviors and psychological factors associated with digital infidelity (Elmas, 2017).

5.2.3. EDUCATION

With respect to educational attainment, the sample demonstrated a relatively high level of formal education. Postgraduate degree holders constituted the largest segment, with 89 respondents (44.06%). This was followed by individuals holding graduate-level qualifications, accounting for 77 participants (38.12%). Respondents at the undergraduate level represented 36 individuals (17.82%). Higher educational attainment is often associated with increased digital literacy and more frequent engagement with social media platforms, which may influence exposure to social media features linked to infidelity-related behaviors (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).

5.2.4. OCCUPATION

Regarding occupational status, the majority of respondents were employed in the private sector, comprising 74 participants (36.63%). Public sector employees accounted for 41 respondents (20.30%), while students represented 53 individuals (26.24%). Additionally, freelancers and self-employed respondents made up 22 participants (10.89%). A small proportion of respondents reported being unemployed (4 individuals; 1.98%), and 8 respondents (3.96%) selected the “Other” category. This occupational diversity reflects varying levels of daily digital engagement and online communication, which are relevant for understanding differences in problematic internet usage and social media-based relational behaviors (Vaast, 2020).

Table 2 – Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=202)

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	94	46.53
• Female	102	50.50
• Preferred not to disclose or non-binary	6	2.97



Age		
• 18-30 years	61	30.20
• 31-40 years	82	40.59
• 41-50 years	34	16.83
• 51-60 years	18	8.91
• 61-65 years	7	3.47

Education		
• Graduate	77	38.12
• Undergraduate	36	17.82
• Postgraduate	89	44.06

Occupation		
• Student	53	26.24
• Employee - private sector	74	36.63
• Self-employed and freelancer	22	10.89
• Employee - public sector	41	20.30
• Others	8	3.96
• Unemployed	4	1.98

5.3. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS

Reliability analysis (RA) is an essential statistical technique used to assess the consistency, stability, and dependability of measurement instruments and datasets (Izah et al., 2024). It is particularly important in disciplines that require high measurement precision, including psychology, education, healthcare, and market research (Izah et al., 2023). Prior to conducting the PLS-SEM analysis, the collected data were systematically screened to identify and eliminate missing values, irregular response patterns, and potential outliers. The results of the statistical analysis were then examined to evaluate the relationships among items within the measurement model. In the present study, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed for each measurement item. Internal consistency reliability for each construct was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients (Chan & Lay, 2018). In the present study, the measurement model



was evaluated by examining internal consistency reliability and construct reliability for all latent variables. The independent variables included Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU), while Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB) served as the dependent variable. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_a), and composite reliability (ρ_c), in line with contemporary PLS-SEM guidelines (Mohd Dzin, & Lay, 2021).

5.3.1. CRONBACH'S ALPHA AND COMPOSITE RELIABILITY

Cronbach's alpha (CA) is a commonly used indicator of internal consistency that evaluates how closely related the items within a scale or questionnaire are. The value of this coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values—typically above 0.75—indicating strong internal consistency and suggesting that the items reliably measure the same underlying construct (Izah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.50 is considered the minimum acceptable threshold, particularly in exploratory research contexts (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, composite reliability is assessed to confirm that the set of indicators adequately represents their respective latent constructs, while convergent validity evaluation ensures that the indicators are strongly correlated with their intended constructs (Pontes et al., 2024). Composite reliability values below 0.60 are regarded as weak, whereas values of 0.70 or higher indicate acceptable reliability (Chan & Lay, 2018).

As presented in the table, Attachment Anxiety (AA) demonstrates acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.730, composite reliability (ρ_a) of 0.731, and composite reliability (ρ_c) of 0.847, indicating that the three items consistently represent anxiety-related attachment tendencies. Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) shows strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.783 and composite reliability values of 0.787 (ρ_a) and 0.873 (ρ_c), suggesting reliable measurement of conflicting relational emotions.

Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) exhibits high reliability, reflected in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.822, composite reliability (ρ_a) of 0.859, and composite reliability (ρ_c) of



0.894, supporting its suitability for assessing maladaptive internet engagement patterns.

Similarly, Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) demonstrates robust internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.864 and composite reliability values of 0.899 (ρ_a) and 0.920 (ρ_c), indicating a strong and coherent measurement of compulsive social media use.

The dependent variable, Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB), shows satisfactory reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.751, composite reliability (ρ_a) of 0.773, and composite reliability (ρ_c) of 0.857, confirming that the items consistently capture infidelity-related behaviors in digital contexts. Sexual Satisfaction (SS) also meets acceptable reliability standards, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.716 and composite reliability values of 0.722 (ρ_a) and 0.875 (ρ_c), indicating reliable assessment of perceived sexual fulfillment within relationships.



Table 3 – Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (rho_a, rho_b)

Construct	Item	Mean	Std	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)
AA	AA1	3.342	1.292	0.730	0.731	0.847
	AA2	3.317	1.320			
	AA3	3.188	1.299			
RAMB	RAMB1	3.292	1.242	0.783	0.787	0.873
	RAMB2	3.238	1.232			
	RAMB3	3.213	1.305			
PIU	PIU1	3.035	1.321	0.822	0.859	0.894
	PIU2	3.168	1.306			
	PIU3	3.218	1.317			
SNSA	SNSA1	3.213	1.274	0.864	0.899	0.920
	SNSA2	3.173	1.311			
	SNSA3	3.188	1.291			
SMIRB	SMIRB1	3.738	1.163	0.751	0.773	0.857
	SMIRB2	3.550	1.143			
	SMIRB3	3.297	1.251			
SS	SS2	3.480	1.336	0.716	0.722	0.875
	SS3	3.257	1.244			

5.3.2. CORRELATION MATRIX



The correlation matrix was employed to analyze the relationships among all study variables. The strength and direction of these relationships were interpreted using correlation coefficients ranging from -1 to $+1$, where values close to $+1$ represent a strong positive association, values close to -1 indicate a strong negative association, and a value of 0 signifies the absence of a relationship between variables (Nazari et al., 2021)

Table 4 – Correlation Matrix

	AA	RAMB	PIU	SNSA	SMIRB	SS
AA	1.000	0.627	0.691	0.691	0.710	0.667
RAMB	0.627	1.000	0.686	0.755	0.646	0.670
PIU	0.691	0.686	1.000	0.881	0.713	0.741
SNSA	0.691	0.755	0.881	1.000	0.690	0.705
SMIRB	0.710	0.646	0.713	0.690	1.000	0.609
SS	0.667	0.670	0.741	0.705	0.609	1.000

5.3.3. COLLINEARITY STATISTICS (VIF)

The variance inflation factor (VIF) is applied to assess the extent to which the variance of estimated regression coefficients is increased due to correlations among independent variables. VIF values ranging between 1 and 5 indicate a moderate level of correlation among predictors. Lower VIF values suggest that multicollinearity is not a concern, confirming that the independent variables do not excessively overlap in explaining the model (Shrestha, 2020).

As shown in the table, Attachment Anxiety (AA) reports a VIF value of 2.264 when predicting SMIRB, indicating a low level of collinearity and suggesting that attachment-related anxiety independently contributes to infidelity-related behaviors. Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) demonstrates a VIF value of 2.605 , which also falls within acceptable limits, reflecting minimal overlap with other predictors. Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) shows a VIF value of 5.231 in relation to SMIRB, slightly exceeding the



recommended threshold of 5. This indicates a potential collinearity concern, suggesting that PIU may share variance with other technology-related constructs in the model. Similarly, Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA) reports the highest VIF value of 5.624, indicating a comparatively higher level of collinearity. Finally, Sexual Satisfaction (SS) presents a VIF value of 2.651, indicating low multicollinearity and confirming that sexual satisfaction (SS) functions as a distinct predictor of social media infidelity-related behaviors. Overall, the VIF results suggest that multicollinearity does not pose a serious threat to the structural model, allowing for reliable interpretation of the relationships between the independent variables and SMIRB.

Table 5 – Collinearity Test

	VIF
AA -> SMIRB	2.264
RAMB -> SMIRB	2.605
PIU -> SMIRB	5.231
SNSA -> SMIRB	5.624
SS -> SMIRB	2.651

5.4. STRUCTURAL MODEL ANALYSIS

Hypothesis testing constitutes a central element of scientific inquiry, as it reflects the researcher's anticipated relationships among variables (Vaidyanathan, 2023). In the present study, hypotheses were evaluated based on the outcomes of the inner (structural) model analysis, which includes indicators such as R-square values, path coefficients, and t-statistics. The acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis was determined by examining the statistical significance of the relationships between constructs, using corresponding t-values and p-values.



The hypothesis testing procedures were carried out using SmartPLS 4.0 software (Luthfi et al., 2022). The p-value represents the likelihood that the observed results occurred by chance under the proposed hypothesis. Following established statistical criteria, hypotheses were considered supported when the p-value was less than 0.05 (Vaidyanathan, 2023). These significance levels were derived from the bootstrapping results generated within the SmartPLS environment (Luthfi et al., 2022). The detailed findings of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 8.

The table 6 presents the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the adjusted R^2 for the dependent variable, Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB). The R-square value of 0.617 indicates that 61.7% of the variance in SMIRB is explained by the independent variables included in the model—Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU). This suggests that the model has strong explanatory power, as a substantial proportion of variation in SMIRB is accounted for by these psychological and behavioral factors.

The adjusted R-square value of 0.608 shows that, after adjusting for the number of predictors in the model, 60.8% of the variance in SMIRB remains explained. The small difference between R^2 (0.617) and adjusted R^2 (0.608) indicates that the model is stable and not substantially inflated by the inclusion of multiple independent variables.

Table 6 – R-square values

	R-square	R-square adjusted
SMIRB	0.617	0.608

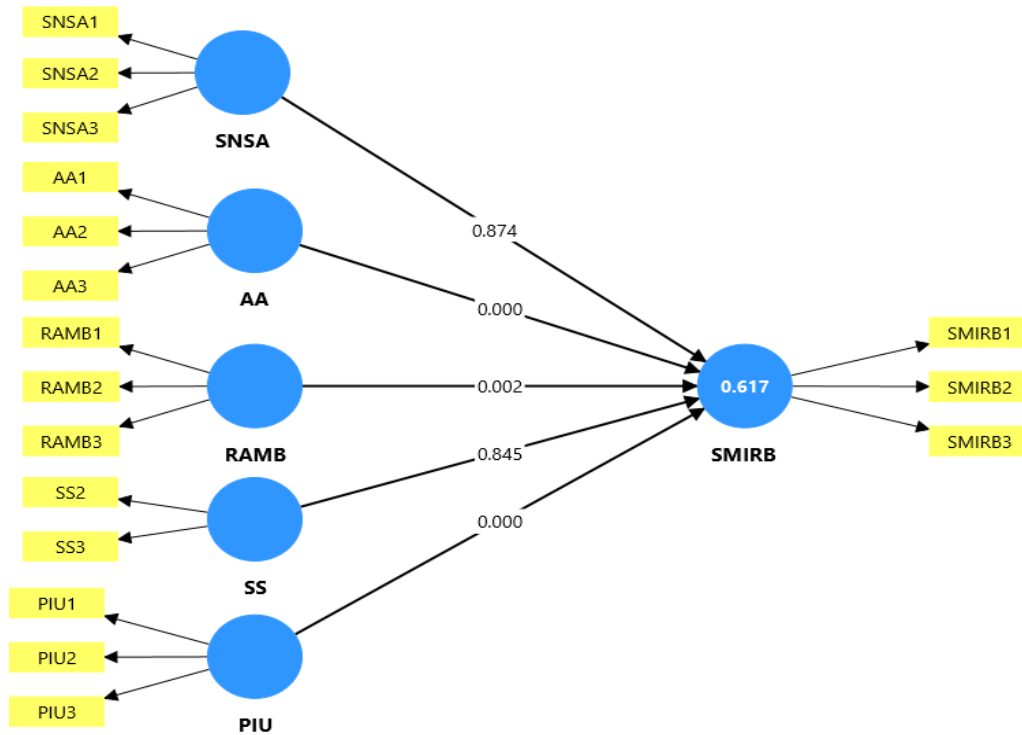


Figure 2– Research model evaluation

Table 7 – Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
AA -> SMIRB	0.363	0.372	0.092	3.965	0.000
RAMB -> SMIRB	0.190	0.193	0.062	3.057	0.002
PIU -> SMIRB	0.331	0.333	0.090	3.657	0.000
SNSA -> SMIRB	0.016	0.006	0.103	0.158	0.874
SS -> SMIRB	-0.017	-0.017	0.087	0.196	0.845

Based on the structural model analysis conducted using SmartPLS, five hypothesized relationships were tested to examine the effects of the independent variables on Social



Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB). The tested relationships included the effects of Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Problematic Internet Usage (PIU), Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), and Sexual Satisfaction (SS) on SMIRB. The evaluation of these relationships was based on path coefficients (original sample values), t-statistics, and p-values obtained through the bootstrapping procedure (Hair et al., 2019).

The results indicate that Attachment Anxiety (AA) has a significant positive effect on SMIRB, with a path coefficient of 0.363, a t-value of 3.965, and a p-value of 0.000, supporting the corresponding hypothesis. Similarly, Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) demonstrates a statistically significant positive relationship with SMIRB ($\beta = 0.190$, $t = 3.057$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that higher levels of ambivalence are associated with increased infidelity-related behaviors on social media.

Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) also shows a significant positive influence on SMIRB, with a path coefficient of 0.331, a t-value of 3.657, and a p-value of 0.000, confirming that maladaptive internet use contributes meaningfully to infidelity-related behaviors. In contrast, Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) does not exhibit a significant relationship with SMIRB ($\beta = 0.016$, $t = 0.158$, $p = 0.874$), leading to the rejection of this hypothesis. Likewise, Sexual Satisfaction (SS) demonstrates a non-significant negative relationship with SMIRB ($\beta = -0.017$, $t = 0.196$, $p = 0.845$), indicating that sexual satisfaction does not significantly predict infidelity-related behaviors in the present model.

When comparing the standardized path coefficients, Attachment Anxiety (AA) emerges as the strongest predictor of SMIRB, followed by Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) and Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB). Overall, the hypothesis testing results reveal that psychological vulnerability factors play a more substantial role in predicting social media infidelity-related behaviors than compulsive social media use or sexual satisfaction. The detailed results of these hypotheses are summarized in Table 8.



Table 8 – Hypothesis Test Result

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Social networking sites addiction (SNSA) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors.	Rejected
H2	Attachment anxiety (AA) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors.	Accepted
H3	Relationship ambivalence (RAMB) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors.	Accepted
H4	Sexual satisfaction (SS) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors.	Rejected
H5	Problematic internet usage (PIU) is positively associated with social media infidelity-related behaviors.	Accepted



6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the darker implications of technological engagement by exploring how psychological and behavioral factors influence Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB). In line with the thesis title, *“The Dark Side of Technology: The Role of Social Media Features on Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors,”* the study analyzed the effects of Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), Attachment Anxiety (AA), Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB), Sexual Satisfaction (SS), and Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) on infidelity-related behaviors occurring within social media environments.

The findings reveal that psychological vulnerability and maladaptive online behavior are more influential predictors of SMIRB than simple dependence on social media platforms. Among all independent variables, Attachment Anxiety (AA) emerged as the strongest predictor of SMIRB. Individuals experiencing high attachment anxiety are more inclined to seek emotional reassurance and intimacy through online interactions, increasing the likelihood of engaging in behaviors and dread of losing their significant other. (Fox & Warber, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; 2007). This result underscores the role of insecure attachment in shaping how individuals utilize social media features for emotional fulfillment.

Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) also demonstrated a significant positive relationship with SMIRB. Excessive and poorly regulated internet use appears to reduce self-control and intensify exposure to online interactions that facilitate emotional or relational transgressions (Agbaria, 2021). This finding suggests that uncontrolled internet engagement amplifies the risks associated with constant connectivity and private communication features offered by social media platforms.

Additionally, Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) was found to significantly predict SMIRB. Individuals who experience uncertainty or conflicting feelings toward their romantic relationships may turn to social media as an alternative emotional outlet, thereby increasing vulnerability to infidelity-related behaviors (Sigfúsdóttir, 2024;



Şerban et al., 2022). This highlights how unresolved relational dissatisfaction can interact with technological affordances to undermine relational commitment.

In contrast, Social networking sites addiction (SNSA), did not show a significant effect on SMIRB. This indicates that frequent or compulsive use of social media alone does not necessarily lead to infidelity-related behaviors unless accompanied by emotional or relational instability (Abbasi, & Dibble, 2021). Similarly, Sexual Satisfaction (SS) was not a significant predictor of SMIRB, suggesting that digital infidelity behaviors are more closely linked to emotional insecurity and relational ambiguity than to sexual fulfillment within the relationship.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the dark side of technology lies not merely in social media usage intensity, but in the interaction between social media features and individual psychological vulnerabilities. This study contributes to existing literature by clarifying that emotional and relational factors play a central role in shaping infidelity-related behaviors in digital contexts.

6.2. FUTURE WORKS

Despite its contributions, this study presents several opportunities for future research. First, future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal research designs to examine how attachment anxiety, problematic internet usage, and relationship ambivalence influence SMIRB over time. Longitudinal approaches would allow researchers to assess causal relationships and behavioral changes across different stages of romantic relationships (Galovan et al., 2023).

Second, future research may incorporate mediating and moderating variables, such as emotional loneliness, trust, relationship commitment, or self-esteem, to further explain the mechanisms through which psychological vulnerabilities lead to social media infidelity-related behaviors (Abbasi, 2021; Ubiwa, 2020; Roos et al., 2021). This would enhance theoretical depth and provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital infidelity dynamics.

Third, researchers may extend the current model by examining specific social media features, such as private messaging, algorithm-driven content exposure, or anonymity,



to better capture how platform design contributes to infidelity-related behaviors. This direction would strengthen the technological focus emphasized in the thesis title.

Fourth, future studies should consider using cross-cultural or multi-national samples to improve the generalizability of findings. Cultural differences in relationship norms and technology use may influence how social media features are interpreted and utilized in romantic contexts (Jin, & Oh, 2010; Karakayali, & Kilic, 2013; Fox, & Andereg, 2014).

Finally, employing mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative modeling with qualitative interviews, could provide richer insights into personal motivations and contextual factors underlying SMIRB. Such approaches would allow researchers to capture nuanced experiences that are not fully explained by statistical relationships alone (Vaidyanathan, 2023).

In conclusion, continued investigation into the psychological, relational, and technological dimensions of social media use is essential for understanding the evolving nature of infidelity in the digital age. Future research building on these findings can inform relationship counseling practices, digital well-being interventions, and the responsible design of social media platforms.

6.3. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study strengthens theoretical understanding of *“The Dark Side of Technology: The Role of Social Media Features on Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors”* by demonstrating that SMIRB is primarily influenced by psychological vulnerabilities rather than by social media usage intensity alone. The findings show that social media features become risky when combined with emotional and relational instability.

Attachment Anxiety (AA) emerged as the strongest predictor of SMIRB, extending attachment theory into digital contexts. Individuals with higher attachment anxiety are more likely to seek reassurance and emotional validation through online interactions, increasing vulnerability to infidelity-related behaviors (McDaniel et al., 2017). This highlights insecure attachment as a central mechanism linking social media features to relational boundary violations.



Problematic Internet Usage (PIU) also significantly predicted SMIRB, suggesting that poor self-regulation intensifies exposure to online interactions that may facilitate emotional transgressions (Gioia et al., 2021). Additionally, Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) was positively associated with SMIRB, indicating that relational uncertainty interacts with technological affordances to weaken commitment.

In contrast, Social Networking Sites Addiction (SNSA) and Sexual Satisfaction (SS) were not significant predictors. This refines theoretical assumptions by showing that frequent platform uses or sexual fulfillment alone does not necessarily lead to digital infidelity. Overall, the study proposes that the dark side of technology emerges from the interaction between individual vulnerabilities (AA, RAMB, PIU) and social media features.

6.4. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings provide several practical insights for counseling, digital well-being initiatives, and platform design.

Since Attachment Anxiety (AA) is the strongest predictor of SMIRB, relationship counseling should focus on emotional regulation, reassurance-seeking behaviors, and trust-building strategies (Wu et al., 2025). Addressing attachment insecurity may reduce reliance on online validation.

Given the significant role of Problematic Internet Usage (PIU), digital literacy programs should promote self-control, boundary-setting, and responsible communication practices (Banić & Orehovački, 2024; Pewnill & Sooksai, 2022). Reducing uncontrolled internet use may lower exposure to risky online interactions.

The influence of Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB) suggests that couples experiencing uncertainty should engage in open discussions about social media boundaries and expectations (Fox & Anderegg, 2014). Early intervention may prevent emotional distancing and online relational transgressions.

Finally, since SNSA and SS were not significant predictors, interventions should focus less on reducing social media usage time and more on addressing emotional insecurity



and relational instability. By targeting psychological and relational factors, stakeholders can better mitigate the darker relational consequences associated with social media engagement.



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APPENDIX A

Part 1: General Information and Social Media Usage Characteristics of the Respondents

Instruction: Please tick ✓ in the answer that represents the fact.

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Preferred not to disclose or non-binary

2. Age (years):

- 21-30
- 31-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-65

3. Education:

- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Postgraduate

4. Occupation:

- Employee - private sector
- Employee - public sector and Freelancer
- Self-employed
- Student
- Unemployed
- Other.....



Part2:Opinions on Psychological and Technological Factors Affecting Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors of the Respondents

Instruction: Please tick ✓ in the column that correspond to your level of opinion based on the following criteria

Level of Agreement				
5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Factors Affecting Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors of the Respondents	Level of Agreement				
	5	4	3	2	1
Social Networking Site Addiction (SNSA)					
1. Used Social Networking Site to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness, and depression					
2. Used Social Networking Site in order to forget about personal problems?					
3. Become restless or troubled if you have been prohibited from using Social Networking Site?					
Attachment Anxiety (AA)					
1. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.					
2. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.					
3. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.					



Relationship Ambivalence (RAMB)					
1. I feel ambivalent or insecure about continuing in my relationship with my partner					
2. If my relationship with my partner ends today, I can think of at least one person with whom I would like to start dating.					
3. If my relationship with my partner ended today, I think I would not suffer much.					
Sexual Satisfaction (SS)					
1. I consider my sex life to be very exciting					
2. I feel comfortable with the quality of sex I have					
Problematic Internet Usage (PIU)					
1. How often do you choose the Internet rather than being with your partner?					
2. How often do you choose the Internet rather than going out with somebody to have some fun?					
3. How often do you feel tense, irritated, or stressed if you cannot use the Internet for several days?					
Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB)					
1. I sometimes wonder whether my spouse/partner would be upset if he/she read my chats, comments, or messages to others on social networking sites.					
2. I sometimes like to chat or message old romantic partners online or on social networking sites.					
3. If my spouse/partner disturbs or interrupts me while I am online, I sometimes get defensive or angry.					



ANNEX A (ETHICS COMMITTEE REPORT)

Dear Mohammad Walihullah,

Dear Professor Mijail Naranjo,

Thank you for filling in the Research Ethics Checklist. After reviewing your request, you can proceed with the study as we do not foresee any major ethical concerns with the project.

Project No.: DSCI2025-1-217509

Project Title: The Dark Side of Technology: Social Media Infidelity-Related Behaviors (SMIRB)

Principal Researcher: Mijail Naranjo

According to the regulations of the Ethics Committee of NOVA IMS and MagIC Research Center this project was considered to meet the requirements of the NOVA IMS Internal Review Board, being considered APPROVED on 06/02/2025.

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers and stakeholders associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change;
- Any unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the Principal Researcher to continue in that role or any other change in research personnel involved in the project.

Lisbon, 06/02/2025

NOVA IMS Ethics Committee

ethicscommittee@novaims.unl.pt

Data with Purpose.

