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Tolerance for Emotional Internet Infidelity and Its Correlate with Relationship Flourishing

Bernadette Nathania Octaviana, Juneman Abraham
Department of Psychology, Bina Nusantara University
Corresponding Author's email: juneman@binus.ac.id

Abstract

Until today, there is still controversy whether emotional Internet infidelity or cheating is something that can be tolerated. Existing views are diverse, influenced by geographical factors, cultural and ideological backgrounds, as well as biological theory. This present study initially suggested that the higher the relationship flourishing, the higher the tolerance for the infidelity. In an era where monogamous relationships are dynamized by the multiplication of relationship modes through online social networks, this study becomes increasingly urgent, i.e. to recommend a variable capable of providing a buffering effect to the deleterious effect of the infidelity. The study used correlational design. As much as 210 participants (55 males, 155 females, M_{age} = 37.89 years old, SD_{age} = 10.870 years) were recruited in the Greater Area of Jakarta, Indonesia to fill out the Relationship Flourishing Scale and Internet Infidelity Tolerance-Emotional Infidelity Subscale. This study found that relationship flourishing and emotional Internet infidelity are negatively correlated (*Spearman's Rho* = -0.172, $p < 0.05$) and there is a moderating role of sex (*coeff.* = 0.3481, $p < 0.05$). That is, those with higher relationship flourishing would have a higher intolerance, especially among men. Such intolerance could lead to marital dissatisfaction and, at worst, divorce. The results of this study have implications for (1) an evaluation of psychometric dimensions of the Relationship Flourishing Scale, (2) the need of proposing moderating variables to be integrated into the correlational model between relationship flourishing and the infidelity, as well as (3) online applications development in detecting and managing the Internet infidelity.

Key words: Internet Infidelity, Relationship Flourishing, Intolerance, Forgiveness, Psychoinformatics

1. INTRODUCTION

Not all romantic relationships held by any couple can run smoothly, either in married or unmarried couples. This relationship will always encounter various problems, ranging from economic problems, communications, or the most common issues but very impactful in a relationship, which is infidelity. The more familiar term to describe infidelity is an affair. Affair (infidelity) is a universal phenomenon, occurring in different parts of the world and can affect any couple regardless of their background. Infidelity can be defined as a feeling or behavior (emotionally or physically) that is opposed to a couple's expectations regarding the specialty of the relationship, where interpersonal trust is broken and commitment in a romantic relationship is low [1]. *Durex Condoms* and several online dating sites have conducted surveys to review infidelity rates in some countries and the results showed that a country in Southeast Asia, Thailand, is the country with the highest percentage of infidelity (56%) [2]. Infidelity becomes the second highest factor behind the divorce in Indonesia in accordance with the data from Directorate General for Religious Courts of Indonesia, as cited in [3].

As the rapid development of technology, infidelity or affair is no longer limited by space and time. The Internet and social media can be accessed easily, anywhere, and anytime. Through social media, anyone can meet and communicate with new people. For example, apps or media like *Facebook*, *Tinder*, or *BeeTalk* can support such interactions [4]. Every aspect of human life has been imitated precisely in cyberspace [5] and technology makes it easier for someone to maintain social relationships. The existence of technology does provide many positive benefits for human life, but this can also bring negative impact when it is being misused. With technology, a person is no longer

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difficult to deviate from the loyalty to his or her partner because there are various media and opportunities for infidelity. In this study, the authors highlight emotional Internet infidelity specifically because this issue is a real and worrying problem in Indonesia and it can have the same significant effect as traditional infidelity for couples who experience it [6].

Internet infidelity does not have an absolute definition. All scientific studies focus on the topic state that this definition is subjective because it depends on the background of the people who define it, such as gender, age, moral values held, and experiences related to infidelity [7]. [8]. In this study, Internet infidelity is defined as an interaction that occurred or started through online contact, involving third parti(es), and kept secret from the spouse [7]. [8]. Internet infidelity (specifically emotional one) is a form of infidelity in cyberspace where individuals have non-sexual relationships with others who are not spouses and there is an emotional closeness between the parties involved [1], [9]. There are two important things related to the reactions that arise from the individual when imagining his/her partner establishing a close emotional relationship with others in cyberspace or doing cybersex [10]: *First*, both sexes feel jealous when imagining their partner is involved in cybersex. While cybersex still causes jealousy, for men, it does not threaten the parental certainty. *Second*, the amount of jealousy, hurt, anger and disgust arise from the affair on the Internet.

The behavioral form of emotional Internet infidelity involves sharing or exchanging personal and sensitive information with others who are not spouses, emotionally distancing from his/her partner, starting absent (or missing) from joint activities, loss of sexual desire and interest in discussing the future together, and these allow for the emergence of sexual closeness with the third party in the future [9], [11], [12]. Internet infidelity generally includes behaviors such as (1) cybersex; which may also involve simultaneous masturbation between the parties through the video (e.g. [13]), (2) the exchange of sexually explicit images or texts, (3) online dating (e.g. [14]), (4) online flirting, (5) watching pornography, and (6) intimate and thoughtful conversations [15], [16], [17], [18]. The infidelity on the Internet can be a prolonged relationship and conducted with another user or a series of interactions with different people in the virtual world [19].

Emotional closeness with others (besides one's own partner) can not always be forbidden and not all can be concluded as an act of infidelity. However, the thing that needs to be concerned is when the closeness to a third party is kept secret and causes one to be away from his/her partner (for example, because of having found comfort or pleasure with a third party). The character of infidelity is the existence of an element of secrecy or concealment from his/her (main) partner [9], [20], [21]. Internet infidelity (specifically emotional one) is a behavior that is conducted secretly so that accurate and reliable statistical data is difficult to find [18]. However, there are some examples of events that describe it. One example of a real Internet infidelity case happened to a couple in Taiwan who had been married for five and a half years. A husband spent a lot of time with the computer compared to his wife. One day his wife discovered that her husband has a romantic relationship with other women in cyberspace [22]. The incident greatly affected his wife. She even tried to commit suicide because she was overwhelmed by the pressure she felt (that she must still be seen as a good wife and mother as well as keep her job) [22]. Such infidelity caused the end of couple's relationship in a divorce.

Not only in Taiwan, Internet infidelity also happens in other Asian countries. One of the countries that has intervened on this issue is Singapore where its government has banned an online affair web site that is quite popular (circulating in almost 30 countries) namely AshleyMadison.com [23]. The development of the site is increasing in Asia, specifically in Japan and Hong Kong. In Japan, the site received 230,000 visitors and 70,000 members in its first four days of launch, and by 2013, 160,000 of Japanese women are members of the site and 60% of them are married women; while in its first month in Hong Kong, this online dating site has 80,000 members and 325,000 visitors [23]. In Indonesia, social media or communications in cyberspace such as *WhatsApp* (WA), *Blackberry Messenger* (BBM), *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *LinkedIn* can be a means of infidelity [24]. There are several examples of emotional Internet infidelity cases in which married people can fall into an affair just because it starts without a purpose and only chats with old friends [24], [25], [26]. The behavior is accompanied by other forms of social interaction that is commonly done in cyberspace such as mutually commenting, liking photos on social media, even to the point of doing cybersex [24], [25]. A wife found an intimate exchange of text on her husband's cell phone with a third party and on his Twitter DM (*direct message*). The proliferation of her husband's affair can be

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seen, that begins only with a greeting, more personal contact exchanges, to more affectionate messages [27].

Internet infidelity can cause the impact as important as traditional infidelity to a romantic relationship and to the cheated individuals. *First*, loss of trust in a coupled relationship, betrayed feelings, and traumatic episodes when he/she is engaging in online activities (especially if one's partner denies or lies when his/her infidelity had been found out) [28]. *Second*, the individual can feel depressed and lose, accompanied by the emergence of conflicting emotions [29]. *Third*, the rise of feelings of hurt, shocked and anger, and difficulty to decide whether to end a romantic relationship or not [30]. *Fourth*, the related cybersex relationship can lead to divorce for married couples [8].

There are several factors that allegedly cause individuals to be vulnerable to continue engaging in Internet infidelity [31]. These factors are still hypothetical since no empirical data has been found which proves the obvious role of the following factors [7]. The *first* factor is *acceptability*. Behaviors that are considered inappropriate in an offline society tend to be more acceptable in cyberspace so that individuals can become more freely engage in or express themselves (e.g. talk about a particular sexual topic or engage in sexual activity for homosexuals) [32]. The *second* factor is *ambiguity* where the uncertainty on Internet infidelity itself encourages Internet users to explore it in cyberspace [7]. The third factor is *accommodation*. Through activity in cyberspace, individuals can express their needs and desires that are in fact contrary to their identity (e.g. having multiple online partners but still maintaining offline monogamous relationships) [33]. The *fourth* factor is *approximation* and this factor is still related to the accommodation because it refers to the incongruence between ideal self and real self that can be accommodated online. There are also three factors that could encourage a person to engage in Internet infidelity. These factors are referred to as *ACE model*; anonymity, convenience, and escape [34]. *Anonymity* is a cyberspace situation where every user can engage in sexual conversation clandestinely without fear of being caught by their partner and the user also feels that he/she has control over the content, atmosphere, and nature of his/her online experience. *Convenience* is a condition in cyberspace where the virtual world provides comfortable and useful online media or applications to interact like e-mail, chat rooms, or interactive role-playing games. *Escape* is a way undertaken by the user in using cyberspace interactions as means for soothing distress while perceiving that what happens in cyberspace "does not really happen" and there will be no other things going forward [34].

It is clear that Internet infidelity causes a number of negative effects, especially for the individual betrayed and on the romantic relationship of the individual (i.e. divorce or separation and negative reactions). However, Lavelle [35] stated that culture puts pressure, especially on married women and couples, to tolerate and overcome infidelity (that can happen at any time) for keeping and maintaining relationships. There were related interesting things found in France and India. Both countries have a more open attitude and willing to tolerate the act of infidelity (though not specifically emotional Internet infidelity). France has a culture where people are more open and accept infidelity or relationships outside of marriage. Lately, a case of infidelity afflicted the French President, François Hollande. But 77% of French say that this issue is a private matter and only 23% think it should become a public concern [36]. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013 found only 47% of French people claimed that extramarital affairs are morally unacceptable [36]. Meanwhile, Indian society becomes more tolerant of extramarital affairs. Based on a survey conducted by an online dating site (AshleyMadison.com) towards its members, it is found that 76% of women and 61% of men stated that the affair is not an immoral act [37]. According to a clinical psychologist, Varkha Chulani, as cited in [37], this tolerant attitude may be due to a change sexual behavior in big cities of India as well as the belief that one lives only once and should be fully utilized.

Unlike France and India, 93% of Indonesians say that an affair with a married couple is morally unacceptable [36]. This is in line with the results of a short survey in 2017 conducted by the authors on 10 married people in which 9 out of 10 stated that they cannot tolerate if their partner has an emotional connection with third parties in cyberspace. There are several reasons why respondents cannot tolerate such matter as the perceived infidelity consequences (1) on destruction of the sacredness of a marriage, (2) on the deviance of couples focus from the marriage life, and (3) that it will increase the chance for one who disloyal to conduct bigger, larger scale mistakes and can make them disrespect their marital relationships.

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Those cases illustrate how tolerance for infidelity can vary from each country. The influence of several things such as liberal education (in some countries), media, and high divorce rates can be the background why individuals become more tolerant of infidelity [12]. Furthermore, in terms of an individual's personality, one who is more tolerant of infidelity (specifically, emotional infidelity) shall be he/she who has a high degree of trust, healthy dependency, who does not have excessive emotional needs (e.g. low jealousy levels), and those with avoidantly attached attachment style [35]. In terms of sexual infidelity, more tolerant individuals are those with attachment styles of anxiously attached, avoidantly attached, and destructively overdependent [35].

Tolerance is defined as a fair, objective, and permissive individual's attitude (in open connotations) to things different from itself, such as differences of opinion, race, religion, or citizenship [38]. Tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity is the extent to which an individual can let his or her partner have an emotional connection with another person (third party) in cyberspace and remains in, stays, and maintains that romantic relationship, even there is a chance that he/she can forgive his/her partner's deviation [39], [40]. Tolerance is a good behavior a person has [38]. When an individual tolerates a thing, it does not mean that he or she also accepts it. Both must be clearly differentiated. One "can tolerate something without accepting it, but cannot accept something without tolerating it" [38]. People's tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity varies. The act of infidelity should normally be prevented, especially between married couples. Individuals should be committed to fulfilling and honoring marriage promises. However, when infidelity has occurred, couples still have choices; some are still willing to try to recover and improve relationships rather than separated or divorced [35]. This is pivotal to be considered in marriage education amidst the rampant and easy use of the Internet causes the great vulnerability of individuals to fall into infidelity. By knowing a person's level of tolerance, an individual can face an affair that is happening in his/her relationship and try to re-evaluate it [41] with thoughtful consideration, discussion, and negotiation.

The authors hypothesized that the level of individual's tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity can be related to *relationship flourishing*. Relationship flourishing is an important part of romantic relationship affirming that the emotional importance of it should be characterized by intimacy, growth, endurance, and a balance between the focus on the relationship and other things in the life (such as social life with others or community) [42]. This flourished relationship is made up of four dimensions, i.e. (1) meaning, (2) personal growth, (3) shared goals, and (4) relational giving [43]. Individuals with high levels of relationship flourishing are individuals who have developed together with their partners during their romantic relationship. Such conditions include the circumstances in which the individual feels that his/her partner and relationship provide a life meaning for himself/herself, a feeling that he/she has lived a life well as a couple [42], and this helps his/her personal growth in a more positive direction in various aspects [43]. In addition, the individual and his/her partner have also established a common goal (either short-term or long-term) and they also want to prioritize their relationship and his/her partner for welfare [43]. Relationship flourishing has effects on high relationship health and low relationship distress. Processes in romantic relationships such as forgiveness, commitment, and trust are often associated with relationship flourishing [42], [43]. Relationship flourishing emphasizes how individuals in romantic relationships have experienced a variety of journeys with their partners for growing and mutually shaping identities and habits [44].

If a partner performs a deviation (i.e., has another relationship with a third party in cyberspace), individual with high relationship flourishing is assumed to have higher tolerance tendency because he/she possess a number of strong positive qualities, has the resilience to face various challenges and more capable of forgiving. This is supported by an explanation that relationship flourishing is characterized by cooperation and effort to make the relationship continue to be better [45]. Individuals in such relationships are those who are able to move forward regardless of the conflict because they uphold commitment, integrity, continuity, family or community loyalty, and stability [41]. An individual with a high relationship flourishing should be more capable to cope with distress and revive when facing a partner who is doing emotional Internet infidelity. They are also able to overcome this issue in a healthy and positive way because they have a deep love for each other [41]. If an individual in a flourished relationship encounters infidelity problem, he/she is expected to pass through a learning process where he/she will seek to find meaning in the midst of

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his/her relationship crisis and attempt to recall the original goal sharing commitment, as well as having the will to change for the better growth. If there is an issue of infidelity in such relationship, it is assumed that the individual might be more tolerant.

A tolerant individual should be one who is able to acknowledge a problem, forgive, and keep moving forward in the face of conflict. Forgiveness is one of the important elements that make up a person's tolerant behavior in which this action shows a positive response to achieve problem-solving [38], [46], so that more likely the relationship will improve, progressively evolve in a positive direction and continuously support the relationship flourishing. Lavelle [35] stated that individuals who are more tolerant of infidelity are those who have a high level of trust, a dependence on the couple within reasonable limits, and do not have excessive emotional needs. These things are in line with the proposition that individuals with a growing relationship are those who have a balanced relationship [42] and it, in turn, contributes to the relationship flourishing.

This present study aimed at investigating whether there is a positive correlation between relationship flourishing and tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity (see Figure 1). This research can be useful for two parties, the couple who are in a romantic relationship and the counselor or therapist. The result of this study can be used as a reference for couples who are going through a problem of infidelity (specifically, Internet infidelity) so that before rashly deciding to separate, they can re-assess the situation with more considerable inputs. The assessment shall be conducted with the expectation that the couple is not immersed in the negative effects of infidelity, but rather make this as a lesson to improve and recover their romantic relationship better than ever. If couples find it difficult to solve this themselves, the counselor or therapist may become the intermediary or the means that propose the evaluation is to be made.

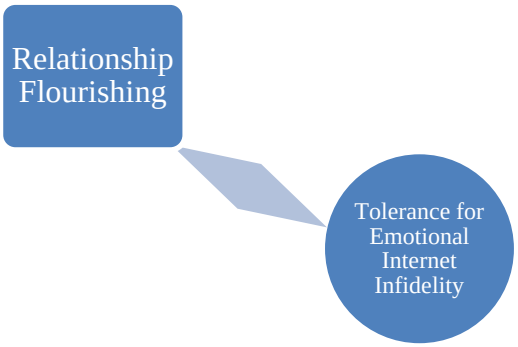


Figure 1. Hypothetical Model

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Participants and design

Participants who were included in this study had the following criteria: *First*, men and women who had or were still married with a minimum six months of marriage. According to Hartwell-Walker [47], the first three to six months of marriage is the stage or phase of the honeymoon where a newly married couple will feel a strong affinity and love. When it has entered the next six months, the strong feelings tend to begin to decline and the individuals in marriage begin to meet with differences or difficulties in their married life (e.g. lifestyle differences or inadequate decision making) [47]. The participants were assumed had been facing conflict with their husbands or wives, and their own focus not only on their partners. *Second*, individuals who fond of using the Internet as a place to interact with others, because the form of infidelity that becomes the focus is Internet infidelity. *Third*, having status as an Indonesian citizen and domiciled in Greater Jakarta, Indonesia. Convenience sampling method [48] was employed, combined with snowball sampling techniques.

There were 210 participants (55 males, 155 females, M_{age} = 37.89 years old, SD_{age} = 10.870 years) living in Greater Area of Jakarta, Indonesia, participated in this study. The mean of marriage age of participants was 134.98 months (11.248 years), and standard deviation of the marriage age was 114.452 months (9.538 years). Most participants worked as private employees (97), housewives

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(40), and entrepreneurs (36). Most of the participants were Javanese (85), Sundanese (27), Bataknese (15), Chinese (14), Betawinese (8), and Minangkabaunese (7). A total of 118 participants were domiciled in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. The rest were domiciled in Tangerang (44), Depok (24), and Bekasi (19). The last formal education degrees of participants were Bachelor's degree (136), Master's degree (27), Senior High school (22), Associate degree (20), and Doctoral degree (4). The duration spent per week by each participant in the virtual/online world were: 71 people spent more than 5 hours, 57 people spent approximately 10 hours, 37 people spent more than 15 hours, 22 people spent approximately 20 hours, and 23 people spent more than 30 hours. The types of social media that are actively used by participants vary greatly. Keep in mind that a participant can be active on more than one social media. There were 18 participants that were active using *Twitter*, 120 using *Facebook*, 3 using *Tinder*, 121 using *Instagram*, 78 using *Path* and *Line*, 4 using *Snapchat*, 184 using *WhatsApp*, and 15 using other media (such as *LinkedIn*, *Telegram*, or *BIGO Live*).

This study used quantitative design to see the correlation between variables, i.e. whether the first variable (relationship flourishing) has a significant relationship with the second variable (individual's tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity). Test of the hypothesis of correlation between the two variables was done using *Spearman's rho* correlation technique because the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test of normality showed that the data on the two variables were not normal ($KS_{\text{Relationship Flourishing}} = 0.126$, $df = 210$, $p = 0.000$; $KS_{\text{Tolerance for Internet Infidelity}} = 0.158$, $df = 210$, $p = 0.000$).

2.2. Materials and Procedure

Relationship Flourishing Scale (RFS) [43] is a scale used to measure the quality of romantic relationships more deeply (eudaimonic) and consists of four dimensions. The items in RFS shall be divided into two groups: *agreement* items (items 1 to 4) and *frequency* items (items 5 through 12). This scale uses response options ranging from "*Strongly Disagree*" (score of 1) to "*Strongly Agree*" (score of 6) for the agreement items and from "*Never*" (score of 1) to "*Very Often*" (score of 6) for the frequency items.

The examples of items of *agreement* dimension are as follow: (1) I have more success in my important goals because of my partner's help (in Indonesian: "*Dalam mencapai tujuan penting, saya lebih sukses karena pertolongan pasangan saya*"); (2) We look for activities that help us to grow as a couple (in Indonesian: "*Saya dan pasangan mencari kegiatan yang dapat membantu kami berkembang bersama sebagai pasangan*"); and (3) It is worth it to share my most personal thoughts with my partner ("*Membagikan pemikiran saya yang paling pribadi kepada pasangan merupakan suatu hal yang berharga*"). The examples of items of *frequency* dimension are as follow: (1) When making important decisions, I think about whether it will be good for our relationship (in Indonesian: "*Ketika mengambil keputusan penting, saya memikirkan apakah hal itu akan baik untuk hubungan saya*"); (2) Talking with my partner helps me to see things in new ways (in Indonesian: "*Mengobrol dengan pasangan membantu saya untuk melihat berbagai hal dengan cara yang baru*"); (3) I make it a point to celebrate my partner's successes (in Indonesian: "*Merayakan kesuksesan pasangan saya merupakan sesuatu yang penting*"), and (4) I really work to improve our relationship (in Indonesian: "*Saya sangat berusaha untuk memperbaiki hubungan saya*"). The RFS reliability test on 45 participants (instrument tryout phase) produced an excellent internal consistency represented with Cronbach's Alpha value ($\alpha = 0.931$). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.541 up to 0.815 ($r_{it} > 0.250$, i.e. good item validities).

Internet Infidelity Tolerance (IIT) - Emotional Infidelity Subscale [35] is a scale used to measure the possibility that a person will settle or maintain a relationship if his/her partner has an affair in cyberspace. Initially, IIT scale only measures traditional infidelity (offline infidelity) and consists of two dimensions; tolerance for emotional disloyalty and tolerance for sexual disloyalty. In this present study, the authors adapted the scale constructed by Lavelle [35] and altered the context of its items in an online situation. The authors adapted only a subscale of this measurement tool, which is the tolerance for *emotional* infidelity. This scale uses response options ranging from "*Very Likely to Leave*" (score of 1) to "*Very Likely to Stay*" (score of 6).

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The examples of items of IIT are as follow: (1) I was in a long-term relationship, and my partner admitted to having feelings for his/her online friend (in Indonesian: "*Saya sudah menikah dan pasangan saya mengakui memiliki perasaan terhadap teman online-nya*"); (2) My partner admitted to kissing someone else using emoticons and he/she felt some connections, but did not engage in sexual intercourse with that person (in Indonesian: "*Pasangan saya mengakui pernah mencium orang lain menggunakan emoticon, di mana ia merasakan adanya koneksi, namun ia tidak melakukan hubungan seksual*"); and (3) My partner was in love with another person who was married, but they never engaged in cybersexual behavior (in Indonesian: "*Pasangan saya jatuh cinta dengan orang lain yang juga sudah memiliki pasangan (suami/istri), namun mereka tidak pernah melakukan cybersex (aktivitas seksual secara online)*"). The main question is "*How likely would you be to leave your partner or stay and try to work things out if ....*" [35] (p. 182). The IIT reliability test on 45 participants (instrument tryout phase) produced an excellent internal consistency represented with Cronbach's Alpha value ($\alpha = 0.947$). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.724 up to 0.907 ($r_{it} > 0.250$).

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

There is a negative correlation between relationship flourishing and tolerance for emotional internet infidelity (*Spearman's rho* = -0.172, $p = 0.012$, $p < 0.05$). It means, the higher the relationship flourishing the lower the tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity. A low correlation (below 0.2) is common in infidelity-related research, probably because infidelity is loaded with social desirability. For example, in the correlation table of the result of research of Rodrigues, Lopes, and Pereira [49] (Table 3, p. 7, $n = 172$), of 21 correlational hypotheses considering the sexual infidelity variables, there were 12 findings (57.14%) that gave significant correlation results. From all 12 significant results, 6 results (50%) had a correlation smaller than 0.20. Regardless of the direction of correlation, if the *weak correlations* are averaged, it will result in a correlation of 0.177. If *all significant* correlations ($p < 0.05$) are calculated averagely without concerning the direction, the correlation is 0.282. If the direction of the correlation is one of the things to be concerned, then the correlation rate becomes even weaker.

However, further analysis using *PROCESS – SPSS* found that there is an interaction effect between sex and relationship flourishing in predicting tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity (*coeff.* = 0.3481, *SE* = 0.167, $t = 2.084$, $p = 0.038$, $p < 0.05$). More specifically, negative correlation is found in male (*Spearman's rho* = -0.412, $p = 0.002$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, there is no correlation between relationship flourishing and the tolerance among females (*Spearman's rho* = -0.099, $p = 0.222$, $p > 0.05$).

Those negative correlations are contrary to the hypothesis that relationship flourishing characterized by the resilience to face various challenges [42], [43] will be able to respond positively to the problems faced, in this case, the ability to forgive which can lead to tolerant behavior. The empirical reality showed that individuals, especially men, who have a developing romantic relationship in a marriage (relationship flourishing) remains vulnerable to experience separation or divorce if his/her partner does emotional Internet infidelity. Relationship flourishing in marriage does not guarantee the survival of marital relationships although both sides have developed positively as a couple.

Related to the phenomenon of emotional Internet infidelity and tolerance when facing it, the Relationship Flourishing Scale (*RFS*) is expected to measure how individuals and their partners are able to solve a problem or conflict. Among the twelve items of the *RFS*, there are only two items that weightily describe the problem-solving in romantic relationships. The *first* is item number 6 and comes from a *goal-sharing* dimension, i.e. "It is natural and easy for me to do things that keep our relationship strong." The *second* is item number 9 and comes from the *meaning* dimension, i.e. "I really work to improve our relationship." However, both items only focus on the individual (one of the parties in the relationship) and do not explore how the condition from the side of his or her partner. In the scale of this relationship flourishing, there is no sentence that states involvement of both parties in the relationship to solve the problem or crisis. The items only emphasize an individual that is '*I*' or '*me*'. Meanwhile, emotional Internet infidelity needs to be solved and corrected *together* and require the efforts of *both* parties in the marriage relationship. Furthermore, the sound of each

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item of the scale seems quite extreme and less subtle so that participants who read might feel that they are being judged or criticized. This limitation can occur because the target sample is not specific to individuals who have experienced infidelity problems in their marriage so that there will be rising tendency to respond in accordance with what appears to be desired by social norms (the existence of social desirability). It is suggested that the *RFS* should be further developed in order to be able to measure how problem-solving or crisis might occur in romantic relationships, by reviewing not only from one's view but also from one's partner side.

Another surprising finding is that relationship flourishing has a different predicting power toward tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity, i.e. depending on the sex. Men are more intolerant. This may be due to the different perceptions of cheating or infidelity between men and women. Men know that if her female partner is having an affair, then the affair is done by all of her *self* [50]. *Self* here involves both lust, intimacy, and love. Unlike men; if a man cheats, then the affair mostly comes from only *one aspect of himself*, namely sex or sexual needs [50]. Thus, the affair of women is perceived by men as the "trumpet of death" of the relationship, in which the woman has decided to gain happiness sourced from outside of her spouse for a long future. Therefore, even though the relationship is seemingly nurturing and growing; when knowing their partner is having an affair, men are more intolerant than women amidst the flourished relationship, and this intolerance can be manifested in both confrontational and retaliatory behavior [51].

The finding of this present study is an extension and a serious challenge to studies that suggested that men (compared to women) are more concerned and disappointed with sexual infidelity than emotional one [52]. Frederick and Melissa [52], p. 175, even claimed, "This gender difference emerged across age groups, income levels, history of being cheated on, history of being unfaithful, relationship type, and length." However, in the online context, this present study shows that men are more upset than women in terms of emotional infidelity. There is an important fact related to emotional (Internet) infidelity, i.e. there can be misconstrual in emotional affairs. The boundary between "(un)intentionally inviting others to have an affair", "being invited by others to have an affair", and "being open to other's invitation" in the online world is so subtle, ambiguous, and hard to recognize or realize [51], [53]. This poses a threat to the self-esteem and manhood of men, giving birth to a feeling of being defeated, smashed, and impotent among men [54] when there is an indication that his partner is having an affair. Schrock and Schwalbe [55], p. 280, defined manhood or masculine self as "self imputed to an individual based on information given and given off in interaction .... [M]anhood acts have the effect of reproducing an unequal gender order." Moreover, in urban life, manhood has undergone a transformation in which a man's faithfulness (as one's spouse) must be secured, appreciated and reinforced especially by the man himself and, in line with the feminism mainstreaming, this ensures the reputation of sexual identity of men [56].

By experiencing emotional Internet infidelity from his partner, the manhood of the man is "hit" twice *suppressing the tolerance* when his partner committed an adultery. *Firstly*, his efforts to preserve his power in relationships (as many social norms in Eastern countries, such as Indonesia, urge him) are challenged by his spouse's unfaithfulness, even though she has not been biologically-physically-sexually touched by her online affair partner let alone the relationship with her (main) spouse is (ostensibly) flourishing. There are perceived uncertainty and enormous powerlessness when a man feels "drowned out" by infidelity even though his relationship was perceived as developing. *Secondly*, male efforts to adapt to a new meaning of manhood, i.e. men should be loyal to their spouses and seek to eliminate male hegemony−that are different from the evolutionary belief (that masculine man is the one who has the inclination to fertilize many women and be aggressive)−were "replied" by his partner with disloyalty. These are the things that make a man, even in a flourished relationship with his partner, have a low tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity of his partner.

The next question is: Why does relationship flourishing have no predictive power over tolerance for emotional Internet infidelity in women? The absence of predictive power describes that, among some women, relationship flourishing decreases tolerance, while among others, relationship flourishing increases tolerance. Similarly, this kind paradox in society was similarly worded by Perel [57] as follows: "Extramarital adventures are painful and destabilizing, but they can also be liberating and empowering." The existence of these two possibilities makes the scores mutually nullify one

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another forming the none of predictive relationship between variables. This can be understood as the anomie of today's infidelity continues to plague. The anomie manifests in the following situations, "Along with them, a community of researchers, authors and therapists now hazards that extramarital affairs – long considered the greatest betrayal – don't have to be intolerable, but can in some cases strengthen a marriage, jolting spouses out of bad, familiar habits. While it's not an approach for everyone (and not when an incorrigible cheater is involved), marital reinvention is a consoling option for spouses who want to return to monogamy after it's been ruptured" [58].

This anomie describes a shift in understanding of infidelity, especially the emotional Internet one, among women. Infidelity could be viewed as a momentum or medium to learn about marriage, especially "what we expect, what we think we want, and what we feel entitled to", as well as functional in maintaining monogamy [57]. This can only be understood by narrative approaches. In an experience of being cheated, it turns out that aspects of the self, especially those that have not been explored or improved, experience shocks. This shock causes the search for authentic self to experience facilitation, as well as generate possibilities, including new happiness (such as a '*second*' *marriage with the same partner*), which could not have been experienced even imagined before. This explorative journey is experiencing proliferation with the growth of social media that opens novel dimensions in one's life.

For the women who participated in the study, it is likely that survival in relationships does not depend on the flourished relationship, but a creative and negotiative management. This claim is not without foundation. There are at least two pieces of evidence about women's creativity in this context. *First*, the evidence relating to how women view affairs done by themselves. Recently, there has been a growing view among women that infidelity [is viewed], "not as a transgression but a creative or even subversive act, a protest against an institution that would come to experience as suffocating or oppressive" [59]. *Second*, the evidence relating to how women perceive the potential for the infidelity of their male partner. Goetz and Causey [60] showed that women (compared to men) were less likely to fall into false positives in assessing their partner's affair inclination. Conversely, men are more suspicious, more jealous, and anticipate the worst situations as well as more stressful facing their partner's potential affair, because, evolutionarily, lots of costs are borne by men if his partner is having an affair. Although Goetz and Causey emphasized the sexual context of infidelity, this present study provides an extension to their research results, that the results apply also in the context of emotional Internet infidelity. The lower level of biased estimation of women (compared to men) on the affair of their male partners makes women more creative in managing emotional Internet infidelity.

4. CONCLUSION

Relationship flourishing has a significant relationship with the tolerance of emotional Internet infidelity. However, the relationship between the two variables is negative and moderated by sex. Man's masculine self and woman's creativity are two things that considered being the moderators of the relationship between relationship flourishing and tolerance for infidelity.

For couples who are married or are in a romantic relationship, it is suggested that every individual should remain alert about the relationship. The conditions in a romantic relationship are not always stable and there will be changes over time, including the vulnerability to having problems like infidelity or affair. This present study provides a new insight into the unexpected effect of the concept of "teaming" in the online world (e.g. [61]), and is anticipated to be the theoretical material for the creation of application of emotional internet infidelity detection through profiling based on social network analysis (e.g. [62]) as well as for the developing affective computing (e.g. [63]) which could counsel on emotional Internet infidelity issue. By this new insight, it is hoped that counterfeit selves [64] in a romantic relationship could be managed as early as possible, so further potential unethical behavior can be minimized.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS



Bernadette Nathania Octaviana is an alumna of Psychology Department, Bina Nusantara University.



Juneman Abraham is a social psychologist who puts interest in Psychoinformatics; Faculty Member-Subject Content Coordinator (FM-SCC) on Community Psychology Studies at Bina Nusantara University (BINUS.ac.id); Former Secretary-General of Asian Psychological Association (APsyA.org); President of Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians-Indonesia Chapter (ABRAIndonesia.org); Head of Organizational Compartment at Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI.or.id); Certified Webmaster Professional (CWP) of the WOW Academy; Member of Indonesian Association of Social Psychology, Asian Association of Social Psychology, and World Association of Personality Psychology. Personal page: http://about.me/juneman

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