More than half of social media users have tried to identify a friend’s secret partner

November 11, 2026

Soft-launching a relationship gives people control over how much they reveal about a new partner. ReverseLookup research suggests that leaving someone unidentified can encourage viewers to look beyond the original post, sometimes bringing deliberately withheld details into wider circulation.

An obscured face is a peculiar form of privacy on social media. It keeps a new partner's identity out of an announcement while making that absence conspicuous to everyone who sees it. A cropped photograph may reveal little on its own, but viewers can move between public profiles and mutual connections to piece together details the couple has chosen to leave out. As personal relationships become increasingly visible through carefully selected images, the ability to control what others learn about them remains considerably more limited.

New research from **ReverseLookup** suggests that concealing a partner can increase the very attention a soft launch is intended to manage. In a randomized experiment conducted as part of a survey of **12,400 adults across the United States, United Kingdom, European Union and Latin America who use social media at least several times a week**, respondents viewed different versions of the same relationship announcement. When the partner was fully visible and identified by first name, **34%** said they would be likely to seek additional information. That figure climbed to **62%** when the partner appeared without a name and **71%** when their face was noticeably obscured or cropped.

The difference suggests that withholding an identity can influence how viewers respond to an otherwise identical announcement. The experiment measured people's stated willingness to investigate rather than whether they subsequently searched, but the increase was substantial: obscuring the partner's face more than doubled the proportion expressing an intention to look further.

For the people posting these images, the decision to conceal a partner can have little to do with generating interest. Among respondents who had soft-launched a relationship themselves, **41%** said one reason was the embarrassment they might feel having to remove posts or publicly explain a breakup if the relationship ended. Keeping a partner relatively anonymous offers a way to acknowledge a relationship without creating an extensive public record that might later become uncomfortable.

That calculation assumes the audience will accept the limits of the announcement. The survey suggests many viewers instead treat missing details as information worth pursuing. Among respondents who had seen a friend or acquaintance soft-launch a partner during the previous year, **53%** said they had actually attempted to identify the person using social media, search results, mutual connections or other publicly available sources.

Much of that behavior appears connected to the presentation itself. Among those who searched, **42%** said they had initially felt little interest in the new partner but became more curious because the post seemed deliberately designed to conceal their identity. The act of withholding information had made an otherwise unremarkable introduction more compelling.

The original platform did not always satisfy that curiosity. **46%** of respondents who tried to identify a soft-launched partner said they consulted at least one additional public source when their initial search provided insufficient information. A relationship announcement intended for a familiar social audience could therefore lead to scrutiny across a much wider collection of publicly accessible material.

Those searches sometimes uncovered information the original announcement had omitted. Among respondents who searched, **38%** said they found additional public details, such as the partner's name, workplace, another account or older photographs. The information was already available somewhere online, but its discovery could connect an otherwise anonymous relationship post to an identifiable person.

The consequences extended beyond individual curiosity. Of respondents who uncovered additional details, **33%** said they shared their findings with a friend, mutual contact or group chat. Information deliberately excluded from the original post could consequently reach people who had never conducted a search themselves. The survey does not establish whether those exchanges were unwelcome, but it documents how an attempt to identify someone can expand the audience for their personal information.

The findings expose a limitation of privacy practices built around selective visibility. People can decide how much of a relationship to display, yet the effectiveness of that decision increasingly depends on whether others respect the boundary. When someone's identity can be reconstructed from information already scattered across public profiles, concealing it in a single photograph offers only partial protection.

For people soft-launching relationships, that creates an uncomfortable trade-off. Revealing less may reduce the personal exposure associated with a public romance, particularly if it ends. But deliberately leaving a partner unidentified can also give viewers a reason to search, making the missing information more prominent than it might have been in an ordinary introduction. The privacy of the relationship ultimately depends on more than the choices made by the person sharing it.

About ReverseLookup

ReverseLookup is a multi-input verification platform for phone numbers, emails, and images. Built for everyday use, ReverseLookup.com enables users to assess unfamiliar contacts, investigate questionable profiles, and identify potential fraud across key digital channels. It combines reverse

search methods with open-source intelligence (OSINT) to offer a direct, accessible way to review digital identities and make informed decisions online.

Media Contact

Ashleigh Thomas | PR Manager | pr@reverselookup.com