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Editorial to the Special Issue: Individuals, relationships and community in the digital era

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KEYWORDS

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)
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Online applications

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ABSTRACT

The present special issue presents empirical studies and theoretical contributions that examine the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on individuals, interpersonal relationships, and the community. Access to and use of ICTs have become more accessible and affordable than ever before, enabling broader segments of the population to engage with them. Their use was further intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, a development inevitably reflected in contemporary research. The articles included capture the multifaceted influence of new technologies across diverse population groups. Several contributions examine the role of ICTs in shaping identity, insofar as technological engagement may influence individuals' self-concept and identity development. As expected, a substantial focus concerns the use of ICTs in psychotherapy, addressing both the opportunities they offer and the ethical and deontological challenges they raise, as well as ways to manage or acknowledge these challenges. Similar concerns are raised regarding the use of ICTs in education. Also, the issue includes studies on problematic ICTs use and its consequences for different populations. Finally, the influence of ICTs on romantic relationships is addressed, including a study focusing on their impact on partner seeking. Overall, the contributions underscore the central aim of this special issue: ICTs are now deeply embedded at individual, interpersonal, and societal levels, and research can guide their optimal use while addressing their potentially problematic dimensions.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become an integral part of contemporary life, shaping how individuals perceive themselves, interact with others, and engage with their communities. Despite persistent inequalities in access, particularly among older adults and those facing socioeconomic constraints, ICTs exert a profound and pervasive influence on everyday experience. For much of the past few decades, media research tended to privilege deterministic and often negative narratives about digital technologies, grounded in dated methodologies and insufficiently attentive to the sociocultural contexts of media use (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008).

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point. It underscored the indispensable role of digital technologies in sustaining work, education, healthcare, psychotherapy, and social connectedness, including the creation and maintenance of intimate relationships (Lee et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, the present Special Issue assembles a collection of empirical contributions—many conceived amid the pandemic's disruptions—that illuminate the evolving entanglements between digital technologies and psychological,

relational, and community life. Collectively, these works invite a rethinking of ICTs not merely as tools of mediation but as active, transformative forces in the texture of human experience.

Giles and Gardikiotis trace the 50-year evolution of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) into a “Stage 7” era, where accommodation occurs *through* and *toward* technology itself. By mapping recent studies on social media style-shifting, chatbot conversations, and human-robot alignment, they demonstrate how classic principles (convergence for affinity, divergence for distinctiveness) extend to machine interlocutors and algorithmic contexts. Their review poses an ambitious agenda: why do humans adapt to machines, and how might such adaptation reshape identity and power online?

Technological interfaces in care and learning are further explored in the cross-cultural study by Christodoulou, Pnevmatikos, Mäkelä, and Fachitidis, who examine students’ perceptions of Socially Assistive Robots (SARs) in educational contexts across Greece and Finland. Using large-scale survey data and factor analysis, the authors identify two core SAR personality dimensions— “Facilitator” and “Regulator”—which collectively form the construct of a SAR’s “pedagogical personality.” Cultural and demographic differences inform students’ preferences, offering valuable insights into the culturally responsive design of educational technologies.

Tzivani and Gazi survey 225 Greek 5th–6th-graders and disentangle how play frequency, gender and videogame addiction relate to overt and relational aggression. Boys play more (≈ 8 h/week), score higher on all addiction and aggression metrics, and addiction fully mediates links from both gender and playtime to aggressive behaviour. The findings nuance the long-standing violence debate: it is pathological, not merely frequent, gaming that best predicts both physical and relational aggression, highlighting key targets for school-based prevention.

Deni and Papachristou offer an interpretative-phenomenological account of therapists’ experiences as long-standing face-to-face groups transitioned to Zoom during Greece’s first lockdown. Interviews with 15 group psychotherapists reveal how “the group behind the glass” demanded constant re-engineering of setting, boundaries, and techniques: confidentiality was more fragile, cohesion harder to forge, and aggression sometimes amplified by physical distance. Yet with creativity, supervision, and explicit attention to bodily cues, clinicians achieved meaningful change, spotlighting both the promise and the limits of virtual group work when crisis disrupts embodied practice.

Continuing with the theme of psychological care in digital contexts, Nioti, Koulouktsi and Papachristou examine individuals’ experiences of transitioning from face-to-face to online therapy. Their qualitative findings highlight the importance of the therapeutic relationship and setting, with pre-established bonds facilitating smoother transitions. Although digital therapy offers flexibility and accessibility, challenges such as diminished nonverbal communication and privacy concerns highlight the nuanced realities of online psychotherapeutic work.

Raftopoulou, Papadimitriou, Sini, Daoultzis and Karakasidou investigate the impact of an online parenting group grounded in positive psychology principles. Their findings underscore the importance of cultivating gratitude, resilience, and self-compassion among parents, as this enhances parenting practices and positively influences children’s mental health. Notably, the study demonstrates the potential of digitally delivered interventions to broaden access to supportive psychoeducational resources.

The contribution by Parpoula, Yotsidi, and Adamopoulou explores the relationship between problematic Internet use and psychological distress among Greek adolescents. Using structural equation modeling, they show that excessive online activity is associated with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity. Interpreting these findings through the lens of compensatory Internet use theory, the study illustrates how digital environments can become maladaptive coping mechanisms that reinforce, rather than relieve, psychological vulnerabilities.

Body image and disordered eating in the age of visual culture are addressed by Davradou and Argyrides, who distinguish between active and passive social media use and examine gender-specific predictors of body

dissatisfaction and eating disturbances among adults in Cyprus. For men, fitness content and photo investment are key risk factors, whereas for women, beauty-oriented content and social feedback mechanisms play a stronger role. The findings lend empirical support to sociocultural and objectification theories while emphasizing the gendered nuances of digital body politics.

At the intersection of media consumption and identity, Sidiropoulou and collaborators present one of the first Greek empirical studies on on-demand viewing. They examine how streaming platforms such as Netflix foster parasocial relationships, promote binge-watching through narrative structures, and serve as a form of emotional escapism. While viewers often experience comfort and stress relief, excessive engagement may lead to fatigue, guilt, and cognitive overload—revealing the ambivalence embedded in contemporary media practices.

Interpersonal dynamics in digital spaces are examined by Lampridis, Toudas, and Kalamaras, who explore adult attachment styles and their relation to romantic partner-seeking behavior on social media. Through cluster and correspondence analyses, the study identifies four distinct relational styles, each associated with different digital engagement patterns. The findings illustrate how internal working models guide online romantic behavior, with securely attached individuals displaying restrained use and anxious individuals showing active pursuit, while avoidant and ambivalent users reflect more complex, sometimes contradictory strategies.

Social connectedness and cultural identity are further explored by Papastylianou and Tsinou, who compare the use of social networking sites among native and immigrant adolescents. Through a comparative quantitative design, they demonstrate how platforms like Facebook and Instagram serve distinct psychosocial functions: reinforcing identity and self-esteem among native populations and facilitating belonging and acculturation among immigrant youth. The study illustrates the dual role of digital media as both a psychosocial resource and a reflection of structural inequalities.

Finally, Gerakopoulou and Christakis explore the social representations of artificial intelligence (AI) through qualitative free association techniques. Their analysis reveals ambivalent public imaginaries, with AI perceived alternately as a threatening, dehumanizing force and as a companion-like entity with human traits. These polarized views reflect broader tensions around intimacy, autonomy, and ethics in an increasingly technologized social landscape.

Taken together, the contributions to this Special Issue provide a comprehensive and empirically informed account of the psychological and relational dimensions of the digital era. Across diverse domains—from online parenting and therapy to AI companionship, social media engagement, educational robotics, and body image—the articles collectively demonstrate that digital environments are not neutral platforms but active agents in shaping human experience. They influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, how they form and sustain relationships, and how they adapt to shifting cultural and technological landscapes. At the same time, these studies illuminate both the opportunities and the vulnerabilities inherent in digital living, calling for a psychology that remains critically engaged, contextually grounded, and responsive to technological change.

In this spirit, the Special Issue contributes to the ongoing dialogue about how psychology, as both a science and a practice, evolves within a world increasingly defined by digital interconnection.

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ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ | INTRODUCTION

Εισαγωγικό σημείωμα στο Ειδικό Αφιέρωμα: Άτομα, σχέσεις και κοινότητα στην ψηφιακή εποχή

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Διαδικτυακή ψυχοθεραπεία
Προβληματική χρήση διαδικτύου
Διαδικτυακή κοινωνική ταυτότητα
Διαδικτυακές εφαρμογές

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ABSTRACT IN GREEK

Το παρόν ειδικό τεύχος παρουσιάζει εμπειρικές έρευνες και θεωρητικές επεξεργασίες που εξετάζουν την επίδραση των Τεχνολογιών Πληροφορίας και Επικοινωνιών (ΤΠΕ) στο άτομο, στις διαπροσωπικές σχέσεις και στην κοινότητα. Η πρόσβαση στις ΤΠΕ και η χρήση τους έχουν καταστεί πιο εύκολες και πιο οικονομικά προσιτές από ποτέ, επιτρέποντας σε ευρύτερα τμήματα του πληθυσμού να εμπλακούν με αυτές. Η χρήση τους εντάθηκε περαιτέρω κατά την περίοδο της πανδημίας COVID-19, εξέλιξη που αποτυπώνεται αναπόφευκτα στη σύγχρονη έρευνα. Τα άρθρα που περιλαμβάνονται στο τεύχος αναδεικνύουν την πολυδιάστατη επίδραση των νέων τεχνολογιών σε διαφορετικά ζητήματα. Ορισμένες μελέτες εστιάζουν στον ρόλο των ΤΠΕ στη διαμόρφωση της ταυτότητας, στο μέτρο που η τεχνολογική εμπλοκή δύναται να επηρεάζει την αυτοαντίληψη και την ανάπτυξη της ταυτότητας του ατόμου. Όπως αναμενόταν, σημαντικό μέρος του τεύχους αφορά τη χρήση των ΤΠΕ στην ψυχοθεραπεία, εξετάζοντας τόσο τις δυνατότητες που προσφέρουν όσο και τις ηθικές και δεοντολογικές προκλήσεις που ανακύπτουν, καθώς και τους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι προκλήσεις αυτές μπορούν να αντιμετωπιστούν ή τουλάχιστον να αναγνωριστούν. Αντίστοιχοι προβληματισμοί αναδεικνύονται και σε σχέση με τη χρήση των ΤΠΕ στον χώρο της εκπαίδευσης. Επιπλέον, το τεύχος περιλαμβάνει μελέτες που αφορούν την προβληματική χρήση των ΤΠΕ και τις συνέπειές της σε διαφορετικούς πληθυσμούς. Τέλος, εξετάζεται η επίδραση των ΤΠΕ στις ερωτικές σχέσεις, μέσω μελέτης που εστιάζει στον ρόλο τους στην αναζήτηση συντρόφου. Συνολικά, οι μελέτες υπογραμμίζουν τον κεντρικό στόχο του παρόντος ειδικού τεύχους: οι ΤΠΕ είναι πλέον βαθιά ενσωματωμένες σε ατομικό, διαπροσωπικό και κοινωνικό επίπεδο, και η επιστημονική έρευνα μπορεί να καθοδηγήσει τη βέλτιστη χρήση τους, λαμβάνοντας παράλληλα υπόψη τις δυνητικά προβληματικές τους διαστάσεις.