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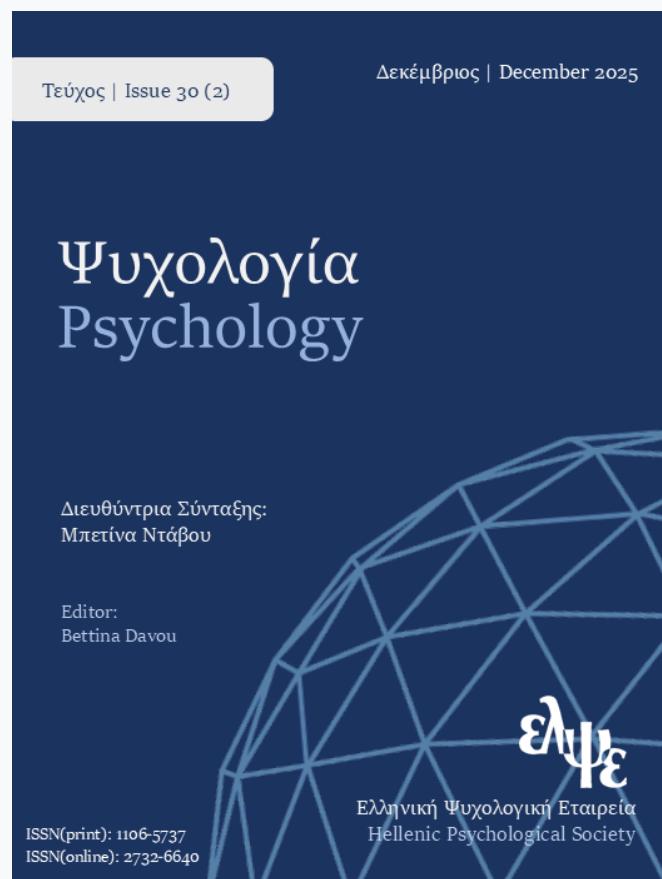
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Adult attachment styles and romantic partner seeking trends in social media

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
	Based on the underpinnings of adult attachment theory with respect to romantic partner choice the present study investigates the trends underlying romantic partner seeking in social media. Previous research has evinced the vast expansion of social media use in romantic relationships (e.g. initiation, termination) and presented findings pointing that individuals with different attachment styles tend to act differently in the social media as far as seeking a romantic partner is concerned. Still, relative findings seem to be fractional and incomplete. In the present research 418 adults completed online a self-reported questionnaire assessing their adult attachment style along with a list of items investigating their use of social media with respect to romantic partner seeking. Cluster analysis indicated 4 distinct adult attachment styles in accordance with the two-dimensional model of adult attachment. Correspondence analysis highlighted noteworthy differences in intimate partner seeking trends. That is, adults high in both anxiety and avoidance were found having active accounts in both Facebook and Instagram, spending more than 3 hours every day in social media, inspecting photos, videos and stories that individuals who are interested in upload, flirting via the social media and going on a date with adults who ask them through social media. On the contrary, adults low in both anxiety and avoidance were found having active accounts in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, but spending at most 1 hour daily in social media, rarely inspecting photos, videos and stories of a person they are interested in and preferring to choose the person they would wish to date instead of being chosen. Findings are discussed with respect to previous ones in the context of internal working models. Implications of the present research might be useful to both scholars studying romantic relationships in the digital world and therapists working with individuals or couples.

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The rapid and vast expansion of the Internet has affected the way(s) in which individuals tend to think, feel and act with respect to their romantic relationships (Murray & Campbell, 2015). Apart from the geometrical growth of dating sites and apps with millions of users around the globe, social media, especially Facebook(FB) and Instagram, seem to have become the new field in which individuals deal with their romantic relationships. As relative research indicates, people promote (Papp, Danielewicz & Cayemberg, 2012), capture (Robertds & Lincoln, 2016) or even terminate their romantic relationships through social media (Anderegg, 2016) and they seek for romantic partners, as well (Meenagh, 2015). The issue of romantic partner choice has been well studied in terms of adult attachment theory highlighting different romantic partner selection criteria associated with variations in the internal working models of the self and other(s) that individuals tend to form and hold through their experiences in romantic relationships (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Indeed, adult attachment theory has been one of the most accepted theoretical frameworks explaining romantic partner choice and research has offered sufficient empirical evidence on this matter (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). However, it does not seem to have

investigated romantic partner seeking trends with respect to internal working models. Respectively, in the case of romantic partner seeking in the social media, it could be argued that scholars studied this issue mainly on the basis of the uses and gratification model (Rubin, 2009) and focused their attention on the kinds and motives underlying the use of social media (Whting & Willimas, 2013). In the last decade or so, a noteworthy number of studies have investigated the association between adult attachment styles and the use of social media (Stöven & Herzberg, 2021). Nevertheless, these studies might have reported differences between adult attachment styles and the use of the social media in general (Oldmeadow, Quinn & Kowert, 2013), but they did not yield findings regarding adult attachment styles and romantic partner seeking trends of individuals who use the social media. Thus, while research has documented that individuals tend to use the Internet and particularly social media to find a paneer (i.e., seeking, flirting) and that adult attachment theory, namely its core concept of internal working models, can adequately explain the criteria of romantic partner choice, the association between them has not been studied. In fact, based on the authors' review of the literature, there appear to be no analogous studies. Therefore, the present study can be considered preliminary, as it aims to investigate whether the adult attachment style of participants is associated with their trends in seeking romantic partners on social media.

Adult attachment theory and the key concept of internal working models

According to John Bowlby's (1969) theoretical suggestions and Mary Ainsworth's (1982) experimental evidence attachment refers to the particular relation an infant develops towards his/her primary caregiver upon the caregiver's response to its calls for the satisfaction of its biological and emotional needs. If the caregiver's response is prompt, consistent and sufficient, then the attachment would be secure and the infant would develop a sense of self-worth, self-confidence and trust towards others. Nevertheless, if the caregiver's response would be inconsistent, then the attachment would be anxious/ambivalent, since the infant would experience stress every time it would call upon the caregiver and would develop an unstable sense of the self as not worthy of love along with a fear of abandonment from others and a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty towards them. Moreover, if the caregiver is mostly insufficient in providing reliable support and rather careless with respect to infant's calls, the attachment would be an avoidant one and the infant would experience discomforting emotions towards the caregiver, emotionalcdistancing and self-reliance. Thus, the infant would develop a sense of unworthiness along with a sense that others are not to be trusted and unwilling to love. Bowlby (1969)also suggested that attachment forms an autonomous behavioral system that determines the relationships a person forms with important others throughout various stages of life. Furthermore, he implied that this is due to the experience of attachment with the primary caregiver gradually forming a broader cognitive framework consisting of two discrete, yet communicating internal working models, one of the self and one of the other(s) (Bretherton, 1999).

Based on Bowlby's initial theory Hazan and Shaver (1987) introduced the concept of adult attachment. Specifically, they suggested that in romantic relationships the appraisal of the fulfillment of basic emotional needs from a romantic panrtner forms analogous internal working models of self and others concerning romantic relationships and romantic partners. Moreover, they focused their attention on Bowlby's idea of potential multiple internal working models and viewed them as analogous to the significant romantic relationships individuals form throughout their journey in the realm of romantic relationships. These models pertain to both the self and the other: a general model established based on the first romantic relationship formed, and a relationship-specific model that pertains to the current romantic relationship and becomes integrated into the general model after its termination. This integration may enhance or alter the content of the general model based on the individual's experiences in that relationship and their partner's responses to the fulfillment of their basic emotional needs. In this context they proposed three types of adult attachment to romantic partner: That is, secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant.

A few years later, Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) introduced a 4-type model of adult attachment by distinguishing the avoidant type into the fearful avoidant and the dismissing avoidant, respectively. During 1990's and until the middle of the 2000's adult attachment theory boosted a great number of scholars to study romantic relationships through the spectrum of a typological approach. Nevertheless, since the mid 2000's the typological approach in the study of adult attachment is gradually abandoned and a two-dimensional model, initially proposed by Brennan et al. (1998), seem to replace it as the ruling conceptual and methodological approach in this matter (Fraley et al., 2015). The model of anxiety and avoidance focuses on studying adult attachment not based on types, but rather on adult attachment styles resulting from combinations of varying levels of anxiety and avoidance in relation to attachment with a romantic partner, namely the secure style (low anxiety and low avoidance), the anxious style (high anxiety and low avoidance), the avoidant style (high avoidance and low anxiety) and the ambivalent style (high anxiety and high avoidance) (Stefania et al., 2023). Still, as far as the internal working models of self and other(s) are concerned, their conceptualization have not changed and they can be described briefly as follows: Secure style: The self is worthy of love, comfortable with intimacy and closeness, others are trustworthy and willing to love. Anxious style: The self is not worthy of love, pressing others for constant emotional confirmation, others are not trustworthy. Avoidant style: The self is worthy of love, sets clear boundaries in closeness and intimacy, others might hurt their feelings and are not trustworthy. Ambivalent style: Not sure if the self is worthy of love, they desire intimacy and closeness, but fear of getting hurt, others could either love them or betray their feelings (Shaver, Collins & Clark, 1996).

Adult attachment styles and social media

Undoubtedly, adult attachment theory is one of the most popular theoretical frameworks for the study of romantic relationships (Thompson, Simpson & Berlin, 2022). Since its introduction and until today a great number of studies have well documented differences in romantic partner choice, both from a typological and a dimensional point of view (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). A common finding of these studies is that individuals tend to choose their romantic partner according to their internal working models, having as a compass the pursuit of a sense of a security, which, in turn, tend to differently conceptualise. For example, an adult with a secure attachment style would choose a romantic partner who also has a secure attachment style. Individuals with a secure adult attachment style are not afraid of closeness and intimacy and seek to develop a deep emotional bond with their partner because they strongly believe they are worthy of love and that others are trustworthy and capable of giving and receiving love. On the contrary, an adult with an avoidant attachment style would prefer a romantic partner who is willing to respect their need for personal time and space within the relationship. An individual with avoidant adult attachment style would value patience, persistence, and respect for emotional boundaries set by the partner with the avoidant attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013).

Although the literature on romantic partner choice in the context of adult attachment theory is rich, researchers have not thoroughly examined the trends of romantic partner seeking with respect to adult attachment style. Similarly, research on partner seeking trends in social media is also limited. Whitey's work (2003, 2004) demonstrated that people tend to use the Internet for flirting with potential romantic partners. More recent studies (e.g., Albright & Simmenns, 2014) not only confirmed that people tend to use social media to find potential romantic partners but also highlighted specific trends in this area. Specifically, Van Ouytsel et al. (2016) found that pictures and status updates are regarded as the most important source of information about a potential romantic partner and that a popular way for an adolescent to express romantic interest is by clicking Like on pistures and status updates from several years ago or that they would try to estabish communication through private messages. Also, Meenagh (2015) confirmed that socialmedia users tend to look at photos, videos and stories uploaded by a person that find attractive. More recent studies (Nexo & Strandell, 2020; Wagner et al., 2022) yielded similar findings pointing that socialmedia users tend to clock Like and use emojis, follow or make a friend request towards a person that view as a potential partner or pursuit communication via private

messages and then propose a date. The majority of these studies are based on the uses- and-gratification model (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Rubin, 2009). This model is interested in the motives, patterns and outcomes of Internet use suggesting that individuals differ in the ways they choose to use social media (i.e., FB, Instagram, Twitter) to satisfy their needs. Throughout its scope, most related research has studied adult attachment styles and the use of social media. In many cases, these studies have presented findings regarding anxious and avoidant styles, though their findings do not seem to fully agree. Specifically, Oldmeadow, Quinnn, Kowert (2013) investigated the relationship between adult attachment and use of FB and found that highly anxious individuals tend to use more intensively FB, while highly avoidant individuals tend to use FB less intensively. Moreover, Morey et al. (2013) found that undergraduates with anxious adult attachment style tended to pursuit online communication with their partner and were more inclined to publish personal information regarding their relationship and their partner, while avoidants tended to prefer email communication over SMS or Messenger and were more hesitant to publish personal information about their romantic relationship. Similarly, findings reported by Goodcase et al. (2018) indicated that anxious adult attachment style was associated with a higher ratio of technology mediated communication, whereas avoidant adult attachment style communication was not significantly related with the ratio of Technlogy Mediated Communication (TMC). On the other hand, in the study by Baek, Cho, & Kim (2014), the adult attachment style that was found to spend more time on social media was the avoidant style, followed by the anxious style. Additionally, in the same study, securely attached individuals were found to have higher rates of life satisfaction and the lowest probability of developing addictive relationships with social media. Quite recently, Stöven & Herzberg (2021) noted in their attempt to review the relevant literature that studies concerning adult attachment style and social media are interested in investigating the quantity of usage (time spent on social media daily), the social and parasocial uses of social media, and the motives associated with that use. Furthermore, they proposed that a common finding of these studies is that individuals with an anxious adult attachment style tend to reduce anxiety by using social media extensively, while individuals with an avoidant adult attachment style admitted that they tend to use social media as a means to manage the threat of closeness.

The present study

Taken together, adult attachment theory is a popular theoretical framework for studying romantic partner choice, and a significant number of studies have provided with sufficient evidence indicating that people tend to choose their romantic partners according to their adult attachment style. Moreover, internal working models of self and other(s) could offer a substantial explanation of the inner psychological processes underlying that choice. Additionally,while research has highlighted the important role that social media play in romantic relationships, the studies have primarily focused either on identifying the trends underlying the search for a romantic partner on social media or on investigating the association between adult attachment styles and the type, frequency, and motives of social media use. In both cases their results can be considered as interesting and contribute to ongoing research on this area, but they seem to have overlooked a more detailed examination of whether there are differences in the way(s) individuals with different adult attachment styles tend to seek a romantic partner on social media. The limited relevant findings mainly concerned the anxious and avoidant adult attachment styles; they did not present sufficient evidence regarding the other two styles, nor did they specifically outline the trends according to which each style seeks a romantic partner on social media (e.g., Hira & Bhogal, 2022; Stănculescu & Griffiths, 2021). This is the aim of the present study: to investigate the trends underlying the seeking of a romantic partner on social media and to explain the differences based on internal working models. Specifically, the study has two goals: first, to highlight differences in romantic partner seeking trends with respect to adult attachment styles and second, to elucidate how individuals with different adult attachment styles tend to behave in this context.

Method

Participants

A snowball procedure was used to generate a convenience sample from general population consisted of 452 participants from various cities of Greece (e.g. Athens, Thessaloniki, Tripoli, Patras, Komotini, Alexandroupolis, Xanthi, Kavala, Serres, Kalamata, Sparti, Larisa, Volos, Trikala) aged between 18 and 64 years (*M* = 41.56; *SD* = 11.44). 102 (24.5%) participants were between 18 – 30 years old, 75 (17.8%) participants were between 31 – 40 years old, 140 (33.4%) participants were between 41 – 50 years old and 101 (24.3%) participants were between 51 – 64 years old. Out of them 270 (56.5%) were women and 208 (43.5%) men. All participants stated that they were single at the time of data collection. They participated voluntarily and they did not receive any kind of reward or payment for their participation.

Measures

Adult attachment style: Adult attachment style to romantic partner was assessed with the Experiences in Romantic Relationships (ECR) - Short Form (Wei et al., 2007). The scale consists of 12 items measuring anxiety (6 items, e.g., "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner" and avoidance (6 items, e.g., "I want to get romantic to my partner, but I keep pulling back"). Both subscales are highly reliable. Specifically, Wei et al. (2007) reported a Cronbach's α = .86 for the anxiety scale and a Cronabach's α = .92 for the avoidance scale. In the present study we found a Cronbach's α = .77 for the anxiety scale and a Cronabach's α = .78 for the avoidance scale. Participants were instructed to think of their recent romantic partner and give their answer in each item on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Romantic partner seeking trends in social media: Based on findings of studies investigating flirting and romantic partner seeking practices in social media a self- reported list was formed asking participants to state how many accounts they have in social media and which of them use more frequently (Hart et al., 2015), time spent daily in social media (Oldmeadow et al., 2013), if they look at pictures, stories and videos uploaded by a person they find attractive (Flynn et al., 2018) , if they have flirted in social media and the practices they employed to do so (i.e., Like, friend request, personal text via Messenger) (Fox et al., 2013), the purpose of flirting (i.e., casual sex, romantic relationship)(Chan, 2017), if they asked a person that flirted with for a date or if they accepted to go on a date with someone who flirted them in social media (Blackhart et al., 2014), and if they view the social media profile of a person they find attractive in order to learn more about her/him (Finkel et al., 2012). The list of self-reported items assessing romantic partner seeking trends in social media is presented in Table S1 (see Supplementary material) .

Procedure

Participants completed the self-reported questionnaire online (via Google forms). The questionnaire was communicated to all email contacts of the authors and through the authors' profiles in social media with the kind request to all recipients to spread the questionnaire to their email contacts and their profiles in social media, as well. By clicking the questionnaires' link participants were directed to the front page of the questionnaire where they were informed about the aim of the study and they were provided with all the necessary assurances about the confidentiality of the information they were about to give. Also, they were asked to give their consent regarding their participation in the study and they were asked to declare their voluntary participation. Finally, they were informed that they could participate in the study only if they were single at the present time. Data was collected during March of 2023. The questionnaire for the study was approved by the research ethics committee of the host institute of the first author (Decision 34259/224/24-02-2023).

Data analysis

As mentioned above, the present study sought to investigate the romantic partner seeking trends in social media of different attachment styles. To do this, first we modeled participants' attachment styles based on their standardized scores on the anxiety and avoidance subscales. The z values of the scales were used for standardization, as no outliers were identified. More specifically, no observation above Q3 were detected on our data. Then, a K-Mean cluster analysis algorithm with Ward's method was applied to the aforementioned two dimensions (anxiety and aversion) to reveal distinct adult attachment styles according to the model. The K-Mean algorithm was chosen not only because it is one of the most popular clustering algorithms, but also because it is commonly used in studies aiming in eliciting distinct adult attachment styles (Eichenberg et al., 2024; Osa-Subtil et al., 2024).

We then applied Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) as a tool to detect latent patterns in our data with respect to particpants' adult attachment styles and their romantic partner seeking trends in social media. We selected MCA because it is specifically designed to treat nominal or ordinal categorical data and is well suited to the types of data we deal with when describing particpants' attributes. MCA works specifically with categorical data, like these in the present study, by allocating scale scores to categories of discrete variables and maximizing the variance of these scores to discover (1) correlations between variables and (2) individual proximity (Atkinson, 2024). In addition, through this method, the overlap between the romantic partner seeking trends of each style could also be highlighted.

In the final step, we applied an ascending hierarchical classification in order to identify the profile of each attachment style by grouping the attributes that characterize each style in relation to their use of social media with respect to romantic partner seeking. Ascending Hierarchical Cluster Analysis (AIT) (metric distance χ2 by Benzècri, Ward coalescence criterion) is considered as a complementary method of the Multiple Correspondence Analysis, in order to enhance the reliability of the results

Analyses were performed via the R statistical software. More specifically, in order to identify distinct adult attachment styles K-Mean algorithm was applied and particularly the function "kmeans" from R library entitled "cluster". In the case of Correspondence analysis, we used the function "CA" as derived from R library named "FactoMine". Visualization was based on "ggplot2" library and finally the hierarchical cluster analysis was performed by using the function "hclust" from "cluster" R library.

Results

First, we wished to test the participants' adult attachment style on the basis of anxiety and avoidance. Hence, the standardized scores of the anxiety and avoidance subscales were entered into a K-Mean cluster analysis algorithm using R Software. The analysis produced a four-cluster solution that included four adult attachment styles: 1. *Secure*, 33.8%, (low anxiety and low avoidance), 2. *Anxious*, 16.6% (high anxiety and low avoidance), 3. *Avoidant*, 30.4% (low anxiety and high avoidance) and 4. *Ambivalent*, 19.3% (high anxiety and high avoidance). Then, we evaluated the already mentioned clustering solution by considering two statistics: the Elbow Method and the Bayesian Inference Criterion (BIC). The elbow method examines the percentage of variance explained as a function of the number (k) of clusters. One should choose such a number of clusters so that adding another cluster would not give much better modeling of the data. In our case, (see, Figure 1) for k=4 the percentage of variance explained tends to change slowly and remains less changing compared to another k. For our data, k=4 should be a good choice for number of clusters. However, k=5 also seems to be a potential candidate. Therefore, we will consider the BIC criterion in order to decide which is the optimal cluster solution. The results of the ten different combinations of constraints for multivariate mixture models have been tested and are graphically presented in Figure 1. The best-selected model is VII with 4 numbers of clusters and the largest BIC gathered.

dditional information on the K-means evaluation based on 28 criteria is provided in Table S2 (see Supplementary material).

Figure 1. *Validating cluster solutions using Elbow Method (a) and Bayesian Inference Criterion (b)*

Elbow statistic for each cluster solution						
Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6	Cluster 7
5,432.000	4,434.060	4,135.196	3,955.527	3,850.204	3,730.075	3,675.455
Cluster 8	Cluster 9	Cluster 10	Cluster 11	Cluster 12	Cluster 13	Cluster 14
3,544.467	3,412.611	3,399.103	3,285.107	3,218.472	3,182.332	3,147.790
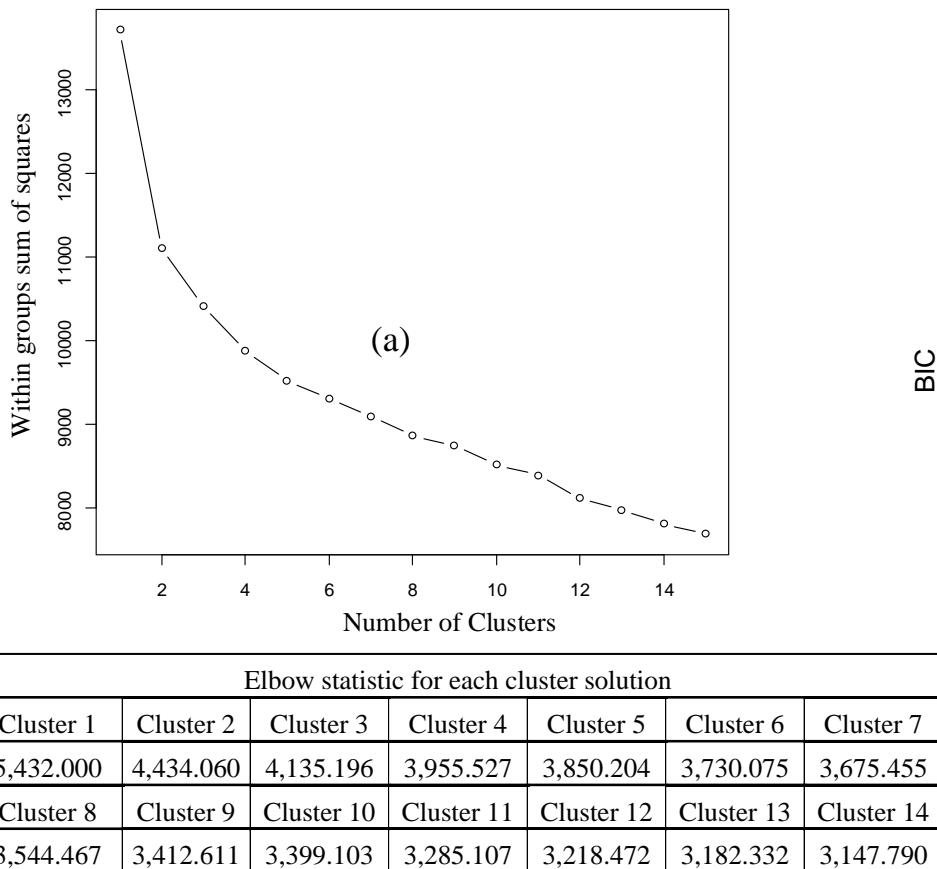
To further validate the insights of our data patterns, we proceeded with the cluster plot of the scores of the first two principal components. This approach may be particularly useful in the sense that if more than two components are needed to capture a substantial part of the variation an alternative approach based on the use of principal components rather than the original variables must be applied. Results (see, Figure 2) showed that four clusters were visible, they were separated enough, and the first two components explained 64.6% of the total variation. Based on the findings and the methods mentioned above, it seemed that the optimal number of clusters choice is four, thus cluster analysis supported four distinct adult attachment styles of our sample.

Subsequently, we used the Multiple Correspondence Analysis method to examine differences across the four adult attachment styles and the romantic partner seeking trends in social media (Total Inertia 0.021, Cramer's V=0.083, chi square (174)=284.076, p<0.001). The first factorial axis of the graphical output for the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (see, Figure 3), explained 51.88% of the total variance, and consisted of two styles of adult attachment: Avoidant (Quality=0.917, Weight=0.214, Inertia=0.007) and Ambivalent (Quality=0.859, Weight=0.270, Inertia=0.004). The Avoidant style mostly contained participants over 40 years old who stated that: "I am flirting for sex", "1-2 times I went on a date with a person that flirted me", "1-2 times I went on a date with a person I was flirting with", "I mainly use my FB account". The Ambivalent style contained mostly participants who stated: "I flirt with Like", "I flirt with Like" "I visit others profiles for information", "1-2 times I went on a date with a person I was flirting with" "1-2 times I went on a date with a person that asked me on a date" "I spend more than 3 hours a day in social media", "I have active accounts on FB, Instagram, Twitter".

Figure 2. *Four cluster solution plot using the first two Principal Components.*
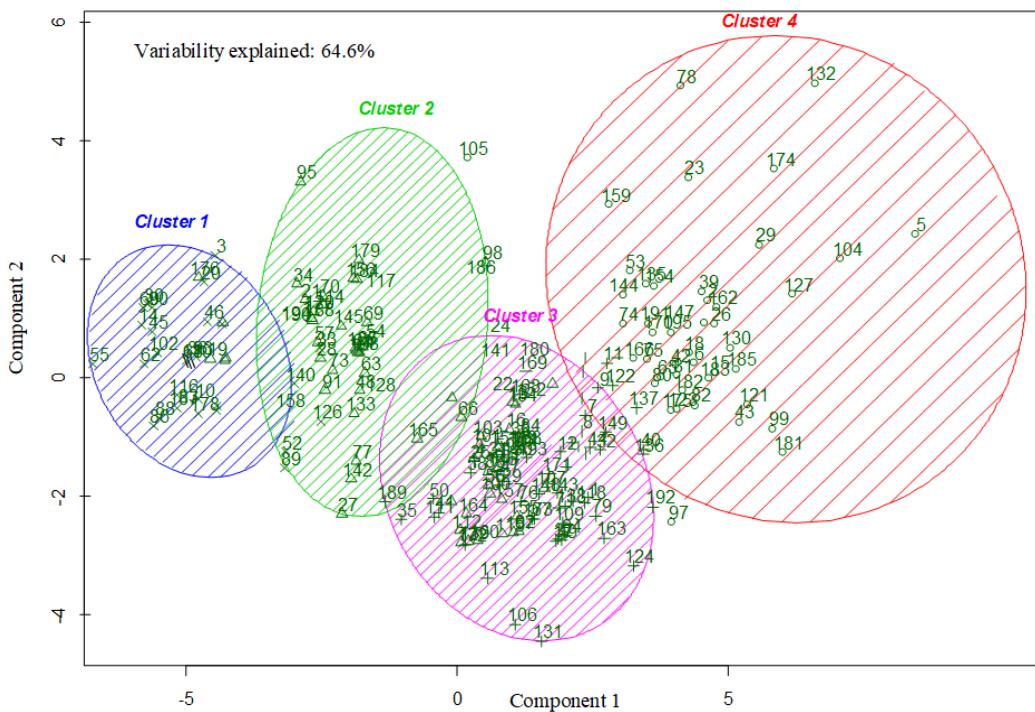

Figure 3. *MCA dimensions: Joint category plot of the explored adult attachment styles and their differences regarding their romantic partner seeking trends.*
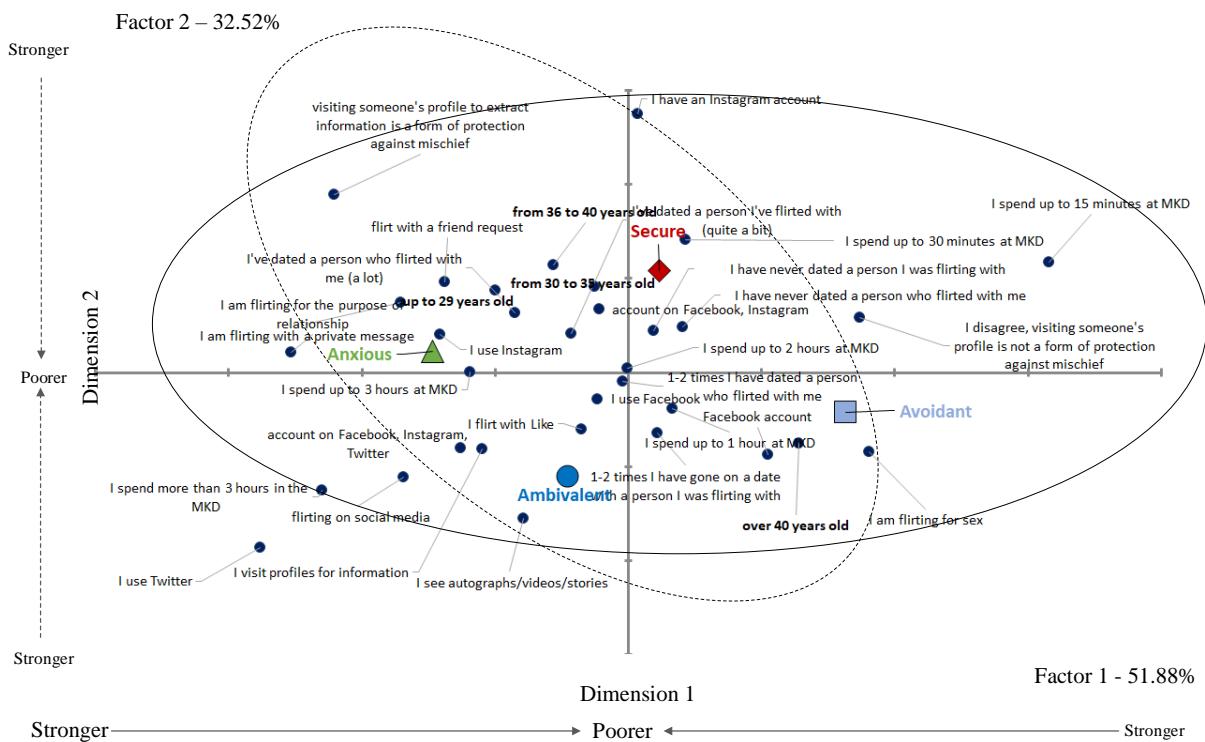
The second factorial axis explained 32.52% of the total variation, distinguishing two groups of respondents (see, Figure 3): Secure (Quality=0.893, Weight=0.313, Inertia=0.004) and Anxious (Quality=0.819, Weight=0.203, Inertia=0.005). With respect to the Secure style, it seems that they were individuals between 30 and 40 years old, with active accounts on FB and Instagram who mainly declared that: "I've dated a person I've flirted with in social media (quite a bit)", "I've dated a person I've flirted with (maybe once)", "I spend up to 30

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minutes on social media", "I have never dated a person that was flirting with me and asked me out", Finally, the participants with an Anxious adult attachment style were young people who mostly used Instagram and reported: "I have never dated a person I was flirting with", "I use Instagram", "When I flirt in social media my purpose is to establish a romantic relationship", "I've dated a person who flirted me (a lot)", "flirt with a friend request", "I've dated a person that I flirted (a lot)".

Furthermore, a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis with object scores method was used to identify groups sharing similar characteristics within each one of the two above identified dimensions. Specifically, HCA analysis yielded 4 distinct clusters (Cluster 1 to Cluster 4) for each dimension, indicating a certain distinct pattern of romantic partner seeking trends in social media for each one. [Table 1 about here]

Cluster 1 mostly included participants with a Secure adult attachment style. Most of them are men and women between 30 and 40 years old, they have active accounts on FB and Instagram, their daily use of social media ranges from 15 minutes to 2 hours, and they have never gone on a date with a person they have met in social media nor they have asked out a person that met in social media. They flirt in social media, but it is not their priority with respect to social media use and they are interested in forming a romantic relationship, but not intensively.

Cluster 2 mainly consists of participants with an Anxious adult attachment style. They are young adults aging from 18 to 30 years old, they mostly use Instagram and spend up to 3 hours a day on social media. They tend to seek a romantic partner on social media and dare to flirt with the purpose of establishing a romantic relationship. Also, they also tend to pursuit that goal both by making a friend request or sending a personal message via Messenger to the person they are interested in. They like to flirt a lot and they do not hesitate to go on a date, either with people they invited them to or with people they have chosen to flirt with. Finally, they view photos, videos and stories of someone they find attractive and think that viewing another person's information appearing on her/his social media profile is a good way to gain information about him/her.

Cluster 3 contains participants with an Avoidant adult attachment style who are over 40 years old, they have active accounts on FB, Instagram and Twitter, but they mostly use FB. They spend more than 1 hour per day in social media, they view photos/videos/stories of a person that find attractive and they declare that they flirt in social media because they are looking for sex. When they decide to flirt with a person they are interested in they prefer to use the Like option to get acquainted with and they are open to flirting. They flirt and they accept flirting and they state that they have been on a date with a person that they flirted with or someone who flirted with them.

Finally, Cluster 4 mainly gathers participants with an Ambivalent adult attachment style. It is the only cluster without sufficient evidence about the age of the participants that are included in it. Apart from that, participants with an Ambivalent style mostly use their FB account and tend to spend 3 hours every day on social media. They admit that they flirt in social media and that they look at photos, videos and stories that a person that they are interested in uploads in her/his profile. They look for sex or/and a relationship and they prefer to approach someone they find attractive by pressing Like to a photo, video or story he/she uploaded. They are open to flirting and they have gone on a date either with someone they asked to or with a person that flirted with them and proposed to meet. Finally, they admit that they view the information that appeared on the profile of a person they are interested in because they think it is a good way to learn more about her/him.

Discussion

Findings of the present research can be considered as satisfactory since they meet the aim and goals of the study. Specifically, it seems that people tend to hold and exhibit different patterns of romantic partner seeking trends in the social media according to their adult attachment style. What is more interesting, though, is the resemblance

Table 1. *Hierarchical Cluster Analysis: Romantic partner seeking trends in social media according to explored adult attachment styles.*

Cluster	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
Adult attachment style	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Ambivalent
Romantic partner seeking trends in social media	Between 30 to 35 years' old	Up to 30 years' old	Over 40 years' old	Active accounts on FB and Instagram.
	Between 36 to 40 years' old	I mostly use Instagram	I mostly use my FB account	I mostly use FB
	Account on FB, Instagram	I spend up to 3 hours in social media	I spend up to 1 hour in social media	I spend more than 3 hours on social network
	I mainly use my Instagram account	I flirt with a friend request	I am flirting for sex	I view photos/videos/stories of a person I find attractive
	I spend up to 15 minutes on social media	I flirt by sending a personal message at Messenger	1-2 times I went on a date with a person I was flirting with	I flirt in social media
	I spend up to 30 minutes on social media	I view photos/videos/stories of a person I find attractive	1-2 times I went on a date with a person who flirted me and asked me out	I flirt with Like
	I spend up to 2 hours on social media	I am flirting for the purpose of relationship	I do not view the information appeared on the profile of a person I find attractive in order to protect myself	I flirt for sex and/or a relationship
	I have never went on a date with a person who flirted with me	I've dated a person I've flirted with (a lot)		1-2 times I went on a date with a person I was flirting with
	I am looking for a relationship, but not intensively	I've dated a person who flirted with me (a lot)		1-2 times I went on a date with a person who flirted me and asked me out
	I do not view the information appeared on the profile of a person I find attractive in order to protect myself	I am looking for a relationship		I view the information appeared on the profile of a person I find attractive in order to protect myself
		I view the information appeared on the profile of a person I find attractive in order to protect myself		

of these romantic partner seeking patterns to the four distinct internal working models of the self and other(s), as those were introduced and subsequently elaborated by Bowlby (1969) and Hazan & Shaver (1987), respectively.

According to the attachment theory, people with an anxious attachment style tend to think that the self is not worthy of love and that others are not trustworthy and that they will never be able to love them as they deserve. Thus, they have a tendency to intensively assert a romantic relationship and always fear that they will be left alone (Shaver, Collins & Clark, 1996). In the present study, the pattern of romantic partner seeking trends regarding the participants with an anxious adult attachment style was similar to that description. Participants with an anxious adult attachment style were found to be those whith the higher usage of social media per day. This finding is in line with those reported by Oldmeadow et al., (2013) who reported that individuals with high attachment anxiety used FB more frequently compared to other adult attachment styles and Goodcase et al., (2018) who found that anxious attachment was associated with a higher ratio of TMC, Also, participants with an anxious adult attachment style stated that they seek for a romantic partner in the social media and they were found to adopt the most direct and assertive way topursuit their goal. In their study Nitzburg & Farber (2013) indicated that anxiously attached individuals tended to use social media, FB and Instagram in particular, to find a romantic partner in an assertive way. Furthermore, participants with an anxious adult attachment style admitted that they went on a date (1-2 times) with a person that flirted them and asked them to and with someone they flirted with and proposed to meet in person. Then, they stated that they view photos, videos and stories of people they find attractive and that they view information someone they are interested in presents in her/his profile as a means to learn more about him/her. In their literature review on adult attachment stress and romantic relationships Simpson & Rholes (2017) pointed that although anxiously attached adults tend to seek for a a close romantic relationship they find it hard to trust others and they are afraid about the honesty and the true intentions of their partner.

On the other hand, internal working models of self and other(s) with respect to the avoidant attachment style imply that people with that attachment style think of the self as worthy of love and that others would want to love them, but they are not sure about the trustworthiness and faithfulness of others. Thus, they tend to set clear boundaries between them and their romantic partner and avoid intimacy and closeness (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010). In the present study, participants with an avoidant adult attachment style were the only ones who claimed that when they flirt in social media their purpose is sex, a statement that could be considered as indicative of their need to sustain the boundaries. Schneider & Katz (2017) found that heterosexual college women with an avoidant adult attachment style were more prone to engage in casual sex in comparison to participants with other adult attachment styles. Also, participants with an avoidant adult attachment sryle stated that they spend less time in social media each day in comparison to the anxious and the ambivalents. This finding is in line with that reported by Morey et al., (2013) who found that individuals with an avoidant adultattachment style tended to communicate with their romantic partners via email instead of texting or chatting in the social neteorking sites. Avoidants were found to be interested in finding a romantic partner in social media, but not as intensively as the anxious ones. A plausible explanation for this finding might be due to their belief that the self is worthy of love and others would love them. In fact Segovia et al. (2019) presented findings indicating that although avoidants are not reluctant towards a romantic relationship, they are open in casual sex relationships and they reported the highest levels of pleasure in such encounters. Moreover, participants with an avoidant style prefered to approach a person that found attractive in a less direct way (by using Like) than anxious ones and prefered to ask instead of being asked on a date. Still, they did not tend to view information appearing in the profile of a person they like probably due to the belief that the self is lovable and others would like to love them. Piϵtromonaco & Beck (2015) clearly suggested that avoidants are those with the highest levels of self reliance, a trait that inhibits a more distant and cool attitude towards romantic partners' trustworthiness.

Furthermore, with respect to ambivalent attachment style the relative theory posits that they think that the self is not worthy of love and others are not to be trusted, but they crave to receive love from others and at the same time they fear that they will be betrayed (Collins & Alland, 2001). In the present study participants with an ambivalent adult attachment style were found to hold a pattern of romantic partner seeking trends in social media very close to the content of the internal working models of the self and others regarding this adult attachment style. Namely, they tended to excessively use social media every day. Also, they seek for a romantic partner but they did not seem to have clarified the purpose of their romantic partner seeking activity (sex and/or romantic relationship), a tension indicative of ambivalence. Likewise, they were found to intensively seek for a romantic partner, they dared to ask someone on a date (1-2 times) and accepted the invitation from another person (1-2 times also), also they tended to view the material a person they are interested in uploads and view any information might share on her/his profile. In the study by Fox et al. (2014) participants with ambivalent adult attachment style had higher scores on both relational uncertainty and interpersonal electronic surveillance.

Last but not least, securely attached people hold internal working models of self and other(s) that view the self as worthy of love and others as trustworthy and able to love them. Intimacy and closeness are not an issue for them since they are not afraid of getting emotionally close to a romantic partner and are willing to welcome love and affection from others (Bretherton, 1999). Findings concerning the participants with a secure adult attachment style seem to be in line with this conceptualization. That is, securely attached participants spend time in social media, but seeking for a romantic partner in not their priority, a finding that confirms similar results presented by Back, Cho & Kim (2014). They are open to flirting, but they practice it rather mildly. They stated that they never went on a date with someone who met in social media and they do not use to view information a person shares in her/his profile, a tendency that could be considered as an indication of their inner sense of security and safety as a result of their belief that others are trustworthy and able to love them.

Apart from the above, further consideration of the present findings offers the ground for a few more worthwhile remarks: first, indifferently of adult attachment style the present findings confirm what both M. Whitty's (2003; 2004) initial work and subsequent studies (Albright & Simmenns, 2014; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016) have pointed out: that people tend to use social media as a means to seek for a romantic partner. Second, young adults tend to mainly use Instagram, while older ones prefer FB. Participants formed the anxious adult attachment cluster mostly used Instagram and aged from 18 to 30, while participants with either a secure or an avoidant attachment style mainly used FB and aged from 30 years old to 50. Recently, Gazit, Aharony & Amichai-Hamburger (2020) reported negative association between age and usage of Instagram. Third, in relation to the previous remark, in the present study participants with an anxious adult attachment style were young adults, while participants with an avoidant adult attachment style were mainly adults over 40 years old. Chopik, Edelstein & Grimm (2019) found that attachment anxiety is high during the third decade of life and tend to decrease as age increases. Moreover, Konrath et al., (2014) found that the percentages of adults with avoidant attachment style tend to increase over time. A plausible explanation might be that adult attachment styles are subsequent to the experiences a person collects during her/his journey on the field of romantic relationships. Those experiences might shift his/her style as a consequence of the shift in internal working models of self and other(s) that the experience of a certain romantic relationship might cause (Fraley, Gillath & Deboeck, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the findings are limited due to the fact that the sample of this study was not a probabilistic one. Also, we did not pre-test the self-reported items assessing romantic partner seeking trends in social media. We acknowledge that any pre-testing would have enhanced the countability of the measure and for that reason we refer to this matter as a limitation of the present study. Also, we did not ask participants to provide Iinformation about their socio-economic status. This could be considered as another limitation of the study since recently Keller (2021) pointed out that low - and middle – income families differ in the way they raise their children, a fact that might affect the evolving internal working models of family members.

Still, the present findings can be considered as useful since they contribute new empirical knowledge to an area of research that a limited number of studies has dealt with until now. Furthermore, the findings taken along with the last remark of the present discussion, pinpoint the need for further and more elaborate research on this issue, especially since recent evidence show that adult attachment styles are associated with constructs such as rejection sensitivity and fear of being single, two variables that depend on the romantic relational experiences of a person and have been found to affect romantic partner choice. In their meta – analysis Mishra & Allen (2023) found that highly anxious adults (i.e. those with an anxious or an ambivalent adult attachment style) are also high in rejection sensitivity which lead them to worry a lot about a romantic partner's trustworthiness and tend to adopt a more assertive and unstable style when seeking for a romantic partner. Sakman, Urganci, Sevi (2021) presented findings indicating a direct positive association between anxious adult attachment style and fear of being single and suggested that adults high in the anxiety dimmnesion of adult attachment might be very intensive in seeking a romantic partner as a strategy to deal with the stress of being single. A new research endeavor would attempt to remedy limitations of the present one by forming and thoroughly validating a list of items assessing romantic partner seeking trends in social media taking into account socio-economic status of the participants. Also, it would be benefitted by investigating the mediating role of the aforementioned variables (i.e. rejection sensitivity and fear of being single) in the romantic partner seeking trends, especially for those high in the anxiety dimension.

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Τύπος δεσμού ενηλίκων και τάσεις αναζήτησης ερωτικού συντρόφου στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
	Με αφετηρία τη θεωρία του συναισθηματικού δεσμού στην ενήλικη ζωή και τη σχέση της με την επιλογή ερωτικού συντρόφου, η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους τα άτομα αναζητούν ερωτικό σύντροφο μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης. Προηγούμενες έρευνες έχουν καταδείξει τη ραγδαία αύξηση της χρήσης των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στο πλαίσιο των ερωτικών σχέσεων, τόσο ως προς την έναρξη όσο και ως προς τη λήξη τους, και έχουν αναδείξει ότι άτομα με διαφορετικά τύπο δεσμού τείνουν να συμπεριφέρονται διαφορετικά στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης όσον αφορά την αναζήτηση ερωτικού συντρόφου. Ωστόσο, τα σχετικά ευρήματα παραμένουν αποσπασματικά και ελλιπή. Στην παρούσα έρευνα, 418 ενήλικες συμπλήρωσαν διαδικτυακά αυτοαναφορικά ερωτηματολόγια που αξιολογούσαν τον τύπο δεσμού τους στην ενήλικη ζωή, καθώς και τη χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης σε σχέση με την αναζήτηση ερωτικού συντρόφου. Η ανάλυση συστάδων ανέδειξε τέσσερις διακριτούς τύπους δεσμού, σύμφωνα με το δισδιάστατο μοντέλο του συναισθηματικού δεσμού στην ενήλικη ζωή, ενώ η ανάλυση αντιστοιχιών ανέδειξε αξιοσημείωτες διαφοροποιήσεις στα μοτίβα αναζήτησης ερωτικού συντρόφου. Συγκεκριμένα, άτομα με υψηλά επίπεδα τόσο άγχους όσο και αποφυγής εμφάνιζαν ενεργούς λογαριασμούς στο Facebook και το Instagram, αφιέρωναν περισσότερες από τρεις ώρες ημερησίως στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, παρακολουθούσαν φωτογραφίες, βίντεο και ιστορίες που αναρτούσαν άτομα τα οποία τους ενδιέφεραν, φλέρταραν μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και δήλωναν προθυμία να βγουν ραντεβού με άτομα που τους προσέγγιζαν μέσω αυτών. Αντιθέτως, άτομα με χαμηλά επίπεδα τόσο άγχους όσο και αποφυγής εμφάνιζαν ενεργή παρουσία στο Facebook, το Instagram και το Twitter, αφιέρωναν έως μία ώρα ημερησίως στα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, σπάνια παρακολουθούσαν το ψηφιακό περιεχόμενο ατόμων που τους ενδιέφεραν και δήλωναν προτίμηση στο να επιλέγουν οι ίδιοι το άτομο με το οποίο θα επιθυμούσαν να συνάψουν ερωτική σχέση, παρά στο να επιλέγονται από άλλους. Τα ευρήματα συζητούνται σε συνάρτηση με προηγούμενες έρευνες και στο πλαίσιο των εσωτερικών μοντέλων εργασίας, ενώ ενδέχεται να αποδειχθούν χρήσιμα τόσο για ερευνητές που μελετούν τις ερωτικές σχέσεις στο ψηφιακό περιβάλλον όσο και για θεραπευτές που εργάζονται με άτομα ή ζευγάρια.

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