Is the quality or the frequency of communication?  
The communication on social networks sites moderates the association between attachment and relational satisfaction*

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Online social networks are very important in every-day life as they offer new possibilities for communication. Couples may benefit from new opportunities and thus achieve better levels of relationship satisfaction. Some psychological characteristics may interfere with online communication in predicting satisfaction. This study was designed to examine associations between attachment insecurity, communication on Social Network Sites (SNS), and relational satisfaction. SNS communication was postulated to be a moderator in the relationship between attachment and relational satisfaction among Romanian young couples. The participants were 73 couples (146 individuals). Structural equation modeling using the actor-partner interdependence moderated model demonstrated that attachment insecurities show strong associations with relational satisfaction (both actor and partner effects) and that both the quality and the frequency of the communication on social network sites shape in different ways these associations. The results emphasize the role of SNS communication and how it can determine different patterns of relational satisfaction based on the attachment orientation of partners.

Keywords: attachment insecurity, relational satisfaction, social network sites, online communication, APIMoM model

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Highlights:

- The quality and frequency of online communication are associated with relational satisfaction.
- Online communication moderates the link between attachment and relational satisfaction.
- The APIMoM model shows different patterns for men and women.

The ways in which couples communicate are crucial to their relationship. Not only that constructive communication is associated with more satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005), but destructive communication may predict divorce (Birditt et al., 2010). Newlywed’s communication can even predict relational dissolution (Carrere & Gottman, 1999). However, in today’s world, couples communicate differently than they used to communicate a few decades ago. Social network sites (SNS) are more important and relevant to everyday life and a great number of romantic relationships start, develop and end on the Internet (Rus & Tiemensma, 2017). They allow for new methods of communication, both public and private (Billedo et al., 2015). In addition, individual differences play a crucial role in the stability of romantic relationships. Previous research pointed to a predictive nature of attachment style for communication as well as for relational satisfaction. This study was designed to test: (1) the associations between attachment and couple communication on SNS; and (2) the interactive effects of attachment and SNS communication on couple satisfaction.

Attachment and Romantic Relationships

The attachment theory describes the ways in which mother and child interactions can shape the behavior of the child (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Also, this framework suggests that humans are born with the need to seek proximity with the intention to become more safe and secure. Based on the interactions between the caregiver (usually the mother) and the child, the later develops one of three types of attachment: secure, anxious, or avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Following in the footsteps of Bowlby and Ainsworth, Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested a continuation of their theory. The mother is the main source of emotional security for a child, but the relationship between romantic partners can have the same function during adulthood. As such, Hazan and Shaver (1987) presented the three types of adult attachment: avoidant (where the individual believes that the partner is not reliable and as a result he/she is usually not interested in a close bond), anxious (where the individual is always fearful of not being good enough for the partner and expects to be rejected), and secure (characterized by low anxiety and low avoidance). Some authors use anxiety and avoidance as two continuous dimensions, while others see them as different categories (Hadden et al., 2014).
Over the years, the relationship between romantic attachment and satisfaction has received constant attention. Usually, the partners who are less avoidant and less anxious, while also being more secure, report a higher level of satisfaction (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). The mechanisms by which avoidance and anxiety determine satisfaction are different. Men’s anxiety seems to influence women’s satisfaction as well as their own satisfaction (Givertz et al., 2016). Also, anxious individuals might become more intrusive (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Motivated by their fear of abandonment, they might demand more closeness from their partners, only to threaten their partner’s autonomy (Lavy et al., 2013; Pistole, 1994).

On the contrary, avoidant individuals seem to think that their partners are more intrusive (Lavy et al., 2010). Avoidant people come from a history of constant rejection and they might be affected by this history during their relationship. Their fear of being betrayed leads them to not call for their needs to be fulfilled and thus they become less satisfied over time (Karantzas et al., 2014). Two recent meta-analyses suggest that in a relationship, avoidance is more detrimental compared to anxiety (Hadden et al., 2014; Li & Chan, 2012). While anxiety also negatively impacts satisfaction, anxious partners are at least very involved in their relationship. On the contrary, avoidance is characterized by disengagement, which might affect avoidant individuals and their partners more (Li & Chan, 2012). Finally, Hadden and his colleagues’ results (2014) show that women report more negative avoidance-satisfaction interactions than men.

Attachment and SNS Use

The advent of social network sites (SNS) has offered a new medium for communication and self-disclosure. Sites like Facebook, Instagram or Tumblr allow individuals that are single or in a relationship to develop new ways of communication. These can be acquired either through the direct use of chat or through comments, likes, and photo posting. In recent years, a number of studies verified the interactions between attachment and SNS. Securely attached individuals seem to have lower scores at problematic Internet use compared to the other two styles (Odacı & Çıkrıkçı, 2014). Insecure attachment negatively predicted interpersonal competency, which, in turns, predicted Facebook use intensity (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). As such, attachment is not only related to face-to-face interactions, but also to online ones. For example, avoidant individuals might prefer online interactions (email or SNS) because they perceive them as less intimate compared to face-to-face ones. They might experience less discomfort compared to speaking face-to-face. Anxious individuals might also find online interactions preferable, but for different reasons. They are afraid of making bad decisions when they communicate, so they prefer a medium where the lack of proximity is more comfortable (Wardecker et al., 2016).

Particularly for Facebook, individuals that are securely attached seem to use the social network in a more positive way compared to those who are
anxiously attached (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). On the one hand, the individuals with a secure attachment use Facebook when they are happy. On the other hand, anxious attachment leads to more concerns about the use of Facebook. Such individuals fear the rejection of their profile. They might use the site when they are in a negative mood, in order to find some positive interactions online (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). When romantic relationships are concerned, anxious individuals are more prone to be jealous and to use greater interpersonal electronic surveillance towards their partners (Fox & Warber, 2014; Marshall et al., 2013). Anxiety leads to more jealousy and lower trust and as such, these individuals verify their partner’s profile more. On the contrary, avoidance is not related to either online jealousy or surveillance. Finally, both anxious women and anxious men report more electronic intrusion towards their partners, while avoidant individuals report less intrusion (Reed et al., 2015).

Communication in Romantic Relationships

Theorists, researchers, and therapists share the idea that communication is important for couple satisfaction. Bradbury & Karney (2013) suggest that negative communication behaviors are more common for distressed couples than for satisfied ones. Also, communication is an important predictor of marital outcomes for newlywed couples (Rogge et al., 2006). Previous research pointed out that the relationship between communication and satisfaction is significant across different cultures (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). Couples may discuss various topics, such as their sexual relationship (Frederick et al., 2017; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005), stress or illness (Manne et al., 2004), positive events (Gable et al., 2006), standards similarity (Preotu & Turliuic, 2015), and the level of communication positively predicts the satisfaction towards the relationship. Although the topic of discussion is relevant, communication skills also take a central stage in explaining the couple satisfaction, especially when conflictual discussions are involved. On the one hand, less skillful individuals may use a form of communication that only escalates the conflict. On the other hand, an individual that uses better communication skills can pay more attention to the real problem, listen and take into consideration the partner’s real demands (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006).

While communication can globally predict couple satisfaction, previous research has suggested that some of its aspects are more important than other. Emmers-Sommer (2004) suggested that the quality of communication is more relevant to the level of relational satisfaction compared to the frequency of communication. The later explained only 10 % of the variance and even more, the number of contacts is less important than their length. This may point to the fact that one important question might be “how long do you communicate?” rather than “how often?”. In regards to the quality indicator, people seem to prefer a type of communication that is smooth, relaxed and free of breakdowns.

In recent years, computer-mediated-communication (CMC) became an important tool through which couples develop and maintain their romantic relationships (Rus & Tiemensma, 2017). The media richness theory (Walther, 2011) proposes that CMC offers a variety of ways in which partners can communicate
(through pictures, text, videos) which, in turn, may act as an appetizer for the partners between the face-to-face interaction. Also, according to the hyperpersonal model of the CMC (Walther, 1996), this type of communication can increase self-presentation and control over what a person is transmitting. This allows the partners to convey more accurate messages, which leads to a better understanding between them. Based on these models, it becomes understandable that how good face-to-face communication is a prime element that leads to a satisfying relationship (Lavner et al., 2016), online, and more specific, SNS communication (both as types of CMC communication) also has an effect on relational maintenance (Billedo et al., 2015) and satisfaction (Anderson & Emmet-Sommer, 2006). Nevertheless, SNS communication offers more opportunities for the partners to involve themselves in behaviors that might lead to higher satisfaction (Tong & Westerman, 2016). Unlike face-to-face communication or other forms of CMC communication (i.e., telephone or e-mail), SNS allow for both public and private communication. Couples can communicate through private messages (with services such as Facebook Messenger) and thus share their private thoughts and feelings with the partner. This allows the partners to feel closer to each other, which leads to higher satisfaction (Tong & Westerman, 2016). On the contrary, public SNS communication (such as comments on the same posts, tags or status updates) is a far less intimate and meaningful form of communication but also allows maintaining a satisfying relationship. Furthermore, this form of mundane communication also leads to more self-disclosure and predicts satisfaction (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Still, not all communication is equal. Anderson and Emmet-Sommer (2006) showed that satisfying online communication is an important predictor for relationship satisfaction. Also, positive communication was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, while negative communication was associated with lower satisfaction (Coyne et al., 2011). When studying the computer-mediated-communication (CMC), Toma and Choi (2016) suggested that the quality, not the frequency of CMC determines the idealization of the partner, which in turn, determines couple satisfaction. Also, some studies that took into account the frequency or the ratio of SNS communication found conflicting results. Goodcase et al., (2018) found that a higher ratio of CMC communication (including using SNS) predicted lower satisfaction, while Baym et al. (2007) found a non-significant association between the amount of Internet communication and romantic relationship satisfaction. However, Tong and Westerman (2016) found a positive relationship between the amount of SNS communication and relational satisfaction.

Attachment and Couple Communication

Anxious and avoidant individuals might have problems when expressing their needs. Their ways of communication might be ineffective due to the poor relationship they had with their caregiver (Davis et al., 2006). Anxiety was associated with destructive communication for both husbands and wives, while secure attachment correlated with constructive communication and the ability to better decode verbal and non-verbal messages (Feeney et al., 1994). Avoidant individuals reported lower interpersonal communication competencies and as
a result, lower social support (Anders & Tucker, 2000). Secure-secure couples report the highest level of constructive communication compared to secure-insecure and insecure-insecure couples (Domingue & Mollen, 2009).

The Current Study

The aim of the present study was to investigate the role of individual differences in attachment and perceived SNS communication in order to understand the way online interactions shape romantic relationships. As the communication technology and especially SNS have become more important in a couple’s life by allowing some levels of intimacy when other kinds of interactions are not possible (Pettigrew, 2009), the research on this topic becomes more relevant. Previous studies suggested that attachment orientation plays a crucial role in determining the preferred method of communication. Highly avoidant individuals reported less Facebook use, while highly anxious individuals reported higher Facebook use (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). For our study, we examined a sample preponderantly composed of college students. Their age group is representative because they are technologically aware and accustomed to the nature and role of SNS. Also, we have decided to use a dyadic model for our research. Recent literature presents a variety of studies that explore the interactions between communication technology, attachment and couple satisfaction (Fox, & Warber, 2014; Luo, 2014; Marshall et al., 2013; Morey et al., 2013; Wardecker et al., 2016), but they rather analyze the experiences of one partner, not the one of the couple. Dyadic data allows us to examine both partners and their traits in shaping both their experiences inside the relationship. As such, we decided to use the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny & Cook, 1999) in the analysis. This model allows the researcher to estimate the associations between someone’s trait and their own outcome (the actor effect) as well as the associations between someone’s trait and their partner’s outcome (the partner effect). By using couples instead of singular individuals in a relationship, we investigated whether the attachment insecurity of each partner and SNS communication at the dyadic level would be associated with own and partner relational satisfaction. This study had two main goals: to investigate the relationship between attachment insecurity and the quality and frequency of SNS communication, and to test whether attachment and the quality and frequency of SNS communication contribute together to relational satisfaction. Thus, we created the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1

The level of avoidance is negatively associated with the number of SNS interactions with the romantic partner. This hypothesis stems from the idea that avoidant individuals prefer the communication tools that allow for less intimacy (Morey et al., 2013). Previous research showed their inclination towards methods that do not allow an immediate response, in the form of vocal or text messages (Oldmeadow et al., 2013). On Facebook, users can send text, pictures or even voice messages and the responses can be immediate, especially nowadays when the advent of smartphones and smartwatches made us continuously
connected to the Internet. Avoidant people are more autonomous and reluctant to share emotions, while also being concerned about how others perceive them (Oldmeadow et al., 2013).

**Hypothesis 2**

The level of anxiety is positively associated with the number of SNS interactions with the romantic partner. The existing literature points to the fact that anxious individuals tend to feel better when they are closer to their intimate partners. As such, their fear of abandonment is reduced (Campbell & Marshall, 2011). They are highly invested and tend to control their relationship (Feeney & Collins, 2001) and as a result, they might be more interested in using any communication tool they have. Finally, Oldmeadow et al. (2013) found that anxiety predicted Facebook use, especially when the individual feels negative emotions (that may be caused by the fear of rejection).

**Hypothesis 3.1**

Both partner’s levels of avoidance/ anxiety and the frequency of SNS interactions with the partner will have an interactive effect on relationship satisfaction. We expect that more SNS interactions with the partner from anxious individuals will predict a higher level of satisfaction while more SNS interactions with the partner from avoidant individuals will predict lower levels of satisfaction. Anxious individuals are prone to using hyperactivation strategies that allow them to make the partner pay more attention to their needs (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). They need constant reassurance and more frequent SNS communication with the partner can make them feel closer and more satisfied. Although, as stated, previous results on the relationship between the frequency of SNS communication and satisfaction offer a contradictory view, we expect that the frequency of SNS communication would moderate the effect of anxiety on relational satisfaction. Previous literature also states that avoidant individuals use deactivation strategies that reduce their contact with their partner (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Thus, more frequent communication with the partner might lead to a decrease in satisfaction for avoidant individuals.

**Hypothesis 3.2**

Both partner’s level of avoidance/ anxiety and the quality of SNS interactions with the partner will have an interactive effect on relationship satisfaction such that less qualitative SNS interactions with the partner from an avoidant/anxious individual will predict lower levels of satisfaction. Nevertheless, good communication can lead to an increase in relational satisfaction (Coyne et al., 2011; Sevier et al., 2008). Although most previous results focus on face-to-face communication, some studies took into account the quality of CMC with similar results (Toma & Choi, 2016). Thus, we hypothesize that the quality of communication within the couple would moderate the link between attachment insecurity and satisfaction. More precisely, it would reduce the negative effect of insecurity for both anxious and avoidant individuals and their partners.
Method

Sample

The data for the current study were collected from a community sample of 73 heterosexual unmarried couples (N = 146). Men’s mean age was 23.58 (SD = 4.3) while female’s mean age was 21.13 (SD = 2.34). Mean relationship length was 25 months (SD = 22.15). Couples reported they live at various distances apart from each other (min. = 0 km, max = 5000 km, median = 0 km). 38 couples (52.1 %) reported that they lived together, 20 couples (28.7 %) lived close to each other (a distance between 1 and 15 kilometers), and 15 couples (19.1 %) had more than 15 kilometers between their residences (with only 10 couples being more than 100 kilometers apart from each other). Participants in the study were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Each researcher contacted two couples, which, in turn, contacted more couples. All participants signed a consent form to participate in the study. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires without consulting the partner and to return them in enclosed envelopes. The participants were not reimbursed for their participation.

Measures

Attachment Orientation

Attachment orientation was measured with the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised scale (Fraley et al., 2000). This scale contains 36 self-report items that classify the attachment style. It includes two scales that assess attachment anxiety (e.g., “I worry a lot about my relationships.”) and avoidance (e.g., “I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners”) (18 items for each scale). Participants report on seven-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a more anxious or avoidant attachment orientation. Internal consistency analysis revealed the following results: for male anxiety, α = .87, for male avoidance, α = .76, for female anxiety, α = .88, for female avoidance, α = .75.

Quality of Communication

We used a section of the Iowa Communication Record (Duck et al., 1991). The participants were asked to assess their communication with their partner on social network sites (such as Facebook or Instagram) using ten 9-point semantic differential scales (e.g., relaxed vs strained, open vs guarded). Higher scores on this scale indicate communication of higher quality on social networking sites. For both males and females, the scale had a good internal consistency: males, α = .83, for females, α = .81.

Frequency of Communication

We used a single item scale: “How often do you communicate with your partner using social network sites (ex. Facebook, Instagram etc.)?”. The answers varied from 0 = never to 7 = a few times a day.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was assessed with the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Participants responded to 16 items such as “How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?” on 6-point scales (from 0 = not at all to 5 = completely). For males, α = .97, for females, α = .95.

The Romanian versions of the scales were obtained by back-translation procedures. Two of the researchers first translated the questionnaires independently into Romanian and the two versions were then compared. When the items were not identical, the decision on which translation to retain was made between the two translators. A native English-language speaker then translated...
this Romanian version back into English. The original English version was compared with the back-translated version. All the translators involved later agreed upon the final translation.

**Statistical Analysis**

We used the Actor-Partner Moderation Model (APMoM, Garcia, Kenny, & Ledermann, 2015) in our analyses. This approach allowed us to include moderator variables in the model, to control for the interdependence of dyadic data and to achieve separate estimates for actor and partner direct effects as well as for actor and partner-moderated effects. All statistical analyses were computed using the IBM SPSS 20.0 software and the IBM SPSS Amos software. Firstly, we computed the descriptive statistics and partial correlations between the variables, controlling for age, relationship length and the distance between the partners. Secondly, we created two different APMoM analyses (one for the relationship between anxiety and satisfaction, moderated by the quality and the frequency of communication; the other for the relationship between avoidance and satisfaction, moderated by the quality and the frequency of communication). Although we measured the frequency and the quality of the communication for both partners, we decided to simplify our model by including only the couple-level moderators in each analysis (as suggested by Garcia et al., 2015). As such, we computed the average of the two partners for both measurements. Each analysis verified whether the couple index of communication (quality and frequency) moderated the actor and partner effects of anxious (or avoidant) attachment on relational satisfaction (see Figure 1). In each analysis, we controlled for age, relationship duration and distance. For easier understanding and interpretability, all predictors and moderators were centered across the male and female participants.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual moderated actor-partner interdependence model. Attachment insecurity is the independent variable. Relational Satisfaction is the dependent variable. Couple Communication Quality and Quantity are the moderators.*

Note. $a = \text{actor effect; } p = \text{partner effect; } m = \text{moderator effect; } m = \text{male; } f = \text{female.}$
Results

Preliminary Analysis

We performed a series of Paired-Sample $t$-tests to assess the gender differences for our sample. The results show no significant gender differences in any variable (see Table 1). Table 2 presents the correlational matrix for the study’s variables. The frequency of communication indexes for males and females and highly related ($r = .85$), as are the indexes for the quality of communication, but with a lower effect ($r = .42$). Couple satisfaction was significantly and positively related to the quality of communication and significantly and negatively related to the attachment insecurities for both males and females. However, it was not related to the frequency of communication. The frequency of communication was not significantly associated with anxiety of avoidance.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and paired sample $t$-test for the variables.

|                          | Mean | SD  | Mean Difference | $t$  | df  |
|--------------------------|------|-----|----------------|------|-----|
| Communication Frequency  |      |     |                |      |     |
| Male                     | 6.34 | 1.28|                |      |     |
| Female                   | 6.21 | 1.42|                |      |     |
| Communication Quality    |      |     |                |      |     |
| Male                     | 7.07 | 1.36|                |      |     |
| Female                   | 7.34 | 1.24|                |      | 72.00|
| Attachment Anxiety       |      |     |                |      |     |
| Male                     | 2.76 | 1.08|                |      |     |
| Female                   | 2.81 | 1.11|                |      |     |
| Attachment Avoidance     |      |     |                |      |     |
| Male                     | 2.43 | .70 |                |      |     |
| Female                   | 2.32 | .63 |                |      |     |
| Relational Satisfaction  |      |     |                |      |     |
| Male                     | 4.15 | 0.84|                |      |     |
| Female                   | 4.13 | .75 |                |      |     |

Note. **$p < .001$; *$p < .01$. 

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Table 2
Correlations among path model variables, controlling for age, relationship duration, and distance

|       | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 |
|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Comm. Quant. M | -  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 2. Comm. Quant. F | .85** | -  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 3. Comm. Quant. C | .96** | .97** | -  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 4. Comm. Qual. M | .03 | .08 | .06 | -  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 5. Comm. Qual. F | .06 | .21 | .14 | .42** | -  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 6. Comm. Qual. C | .05 | .16 | .12 | .86** | .82** | -  |    |    |    |    |    |
| 7. Anx. M | .12 | .14 | .13 | -.50** | -.31* | -.49** | -  |    |    |    |    |
| 8. Anx. F | .04 | .11 | .08 | -.19 | -.16 | -.21 | .34** | -  |    |    |    |
| 9. Avoid. M | -.06 | -.08 | -.07 | -.73** | -.41** | -.69** | .59** | .31* | -  |    |    |
| 10. Avoid. F | -.03 | .02 | .00 | -.31* | -.27* | -.35** | -.37** | .35** | .37** | -  |    |
| 11. Sat. M | .13 | .05 | .09 | .74** | .24* | .60 | -.54** | -.22 | -.72** | -.45** | - |
| 12. Sat. F | .16 | .13 | .15 | .40** | .50** | .53** | .47** | -.45** | -.54** | -.78** | .52** |

Note. ** p < .001; * p < .01; M = male variable; F = female variable; C = couple variable; Comm. Quant = Communication Frequency; Comm. Qual. = Communication Quality; Anx. = Attachment Anxiety; Avoid. = Attachment Avoidance; Sat. = Relational Satisfaction.

The Effect of Avoidant Attachment on Relational Satisfaction Moderated by the Frequency and the Quality of Communication

The model showed a very good fit: $\chi^2(49) = 56.292, p = .22, \chi^2/df = 1.14$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .04 (.00–.09). The results (see Table 3) indicated that male and female avoidant attachment has a significant negative effect on male, respectively female satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = -.57, \beta_{female} = -.59$). The female avoidant attachment also had significant partner effects on male satisfaction ($\beta_{female} = -.18$), but male avoidance did not have a significant partner effect on female satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = -.16$). The couple level of communication quality had a significant effect on female satisfaction ($\beta_{female} = .27$), but not on male satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = .18$). The frequency of communication also had a significant effect on female satisfaction ($\beta_{female} = .16$), but not on male satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = .11$). The actor interaction effect was significant for females, for both quality and frequency ($\beta_{female-quality} = .20, \beta_{female-frequency} = .19$), but not for males ($\beta_{male-quality} = -.07, \beta_{male-frequency} = .10$). The interaction plot shows that the slopes of the relationships between female avoidance and female satisfaction are negative in both high and low quality of communication (see Fig. 2). Yet, the slope is more accentuated in the group with low quality of communication, suggesting that the deterring effect of avoidance on satisfaction is stronger among these females. The second interaction plot (see Fig. 3) shows that female avoidance is more detrimental to female satisfaction in couples where the level of communication in low compared to couples where the partners communicate more often. The partner interaction effects between avoidance and the quality of communication show no significance in both males and females ($\beta_{male-quality} = -.02, \beta_{female-quality} = .11$). Still, the combined effect of female avoidance and frequency of communication significantly predicts male satisfaction.
satisfaction (βfemale = .19) while the male moderated partner effect was not significant (βmale = −.03). The interaction plot shows that in the conditions of a low frequency of communication, female avoidance becomes more detrimental to male satisfaction (see Fig. 4).

Table 3
Model predicting couple satisfaction from attachment avoidance, moderated by the quality and frequency of couple communication

| Effect                                      | Unstandardised Coefficient | Standardised Coefficient | SE  | p    |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----|------|
| Actor Effect of Avoidance                   |                            |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | -.57                       | -.69                     | .13 | < .001|
| Female                                      | -.59                       | -.70                     | .08 | < .001|
| Partner Effect of Avoidance                 |                            |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | -.16                       | -.17                     | .09 | .06  |
| Female                                      | -.18                       | -.24                     | .11 | .04  |
| Quality of Communication                    |                            |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | .18                        | .14                      | .08 | .09  |
| Female                                      | .27                        | .19                      | .06 | .00  |
| Frequency of Communication                  |                            |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | .11                        | .07                      | .05 | .12  |
| Female                                      | .16                        | .09                      | .03 | .01  |
| Actor Avoidance by Quality of Communication|                            |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | -.07                       | -.07                     | .08 | .43  |
| Female                                      | .20                        | .22                      | .08 | .00  |
| Partner Avoidance by Quality of Communication|                          |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | -.02                       | -.02                     | .06 | .79  |
| Female                                      | .11                        | .14                      | .10 | .18  |
| Actor Avoidance by Frequency of Communication|                          |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | .10                        | .11                      | .08 | .19  |
| Female                                      | .19                        | .19                      | .06 | .00  |
| Partner Avoidance by Frequency of Communication|                          |                          |     |      |
| Male                                        | -.03                       | -.03                     | .06 | .60  |
| Female                                      | .19                        | .21                      | .09 | .01  |

Note. A significant and positive standardized interaction effect shows that the more positive the moderator is, the less adverse becomes the effect of the Independent Variable on the Dependent Variable.
**Figure 2**
Female satisfaction at low and high female avoidance for couples with low vs high quality of communication.

![Graph](image1)

**Figure 3**
Female satisfaction at low and high female avoidance for couples with low vs high frequency of communication.

![Graph](image2)
The Effect of Anxious Attachment on Relational Satisfaction Moderated by the Frequency and the Quality of Communication

The model showed a very good fit: $\chi^2(50) = 50.75$, $p = .44$, $\chi^2/df = 1.01$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .01 (.00–.08). The results (see Table 4) indicated that male and female anxious attachment has a significant negative effect on male, respectively female satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = -.38$, $\beta_{female} = -.43$). The partner effect was not significant for either males or females ($\beta_{male} = -.04$; $\beta_{female} = -.03$). The quality of communication had a significant effect on male and female satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = .39$; $\beta_{female} = .43$). The frequency of communication was associated with male satisfaction ($\beta_{male} = .20$), but not with female satisfaction ($\beta_{female} = .13$). For the quality of communication, the actor interaction effect was significant for females ($\beta_{female-quality} = .16$), but not for males ($\beta_{male-quality} = -.03$). The interaction plot shows that the slope representing the relationship between female anxiety and female satisfaction is steeper for women coming from couples who communicate badly (see Fig. 5). The partner interaction effects a significant interaction between male anxiety and the quality of communication on female satisfaction ($\beta_{male-quality} = .19$) and no significance for the interaction between female anxiety and quality of communication ($\beta_{male-quality} = .07$). The interaction plot shows that in the case of high-quality communication, higher male anxiety can determine growth in female satisfaction. However, when the quality of communication is low, higher male anxiety determines lower female satisfaction (see Fig. 6).

For the frequency of communication, the actor interaction effect was significant in females ($\beta_{female-frequency} = .34$), but not in males ($\beta_{male-
frequency = .19). The interaction plot shows that when the frequency of communication is high, there is no difference in female satisfaction regardless of the female level of anxiety. However, when communication is not frequent, their own level of anxiety becomes detrimental for women (Fig. 7). For partner effects, the interaction did not have a significant effect on male or female satisfaction (βmale-frequency = −.19; βfemale-frequency = .03).

**Table 4**
Model predicting couple satisfaction from attachment anxiety, moderated by the quality and frequency of couple communication

| Effect                                                   | Unstandardised Coefficient | Standardised Coefficient | SE  | p   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----|-----|
| Actor Effect of Anxiety                                  |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | -.38                       | -.29                     | .06 | < .001 |
| Female                                                   | -.43                       | -.28                     | .09 | < .001 |
| Partner Effect of Anxiety                               |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | -.04                       | -.02                     | .08 | .80 |
| Female                                                   | -.03                       | -.03                     | .08 | .71 |
| Quality of Communication                                |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | .39                        | .31                      | .08 | < .001 |
| Female                                                   | .43                        | .30                      | .07 | < .001 |
| Frequency of Communication                              |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | .20                        | .13                      | .06 | .03 |
| Female                                                   | .13                        | .08                      | .05 | .12 |
| Actor Anxiety by Quality of Communication               |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | -.03                       | -.02                     | .07 | .79 |
| Female                                                   | .16                        | .11                      | .06 | .05 |
| Partner Anxiety by Quality of Communication             |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | .19                        | .12                      | .06 | .04 |
| Female                                                   | .07                        | .05                      | .07 | .45 |
| Actor Anxiety by Frequency of Communication              |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | .19                        | .13                      | .08 | .12 |
| Female                                                   | .34                        | .22                      | .07 | .00 |
| Partner Anxiety by Frequency of Communication            |                            |                          |     |     |
| Male                                                     | -.19                       | -.11                     | .07 | .10 |
| Female                                                   | .03                        | .02                      | .08 | .80 |

*Note.* A significant and positive standardized interaction effect shows that the more positive the moderator is, the less adverse becomes the effect of the Independent Variable on the Dependent Variable.
Figure 5
Female satisfaction at low and high female anxiety for couples with low vs high quality of communication.

Figure 6
Female satisfaction at low and high male anxiety for couples with low vs high quality of communication.
Discussion

The present research provides information on how attachment insecurity and SNS communication contribute to the maintenance of relational satisfaction in a sample of young adults. The first aim was to verify whether avoidance and anxiety were related to online communication on SNS sites between the partners. Secondly, we were interested in the interactions between insecurity and online communication and their associations with relational satisfaction. For this, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with moderation analysis has been used.

Firstly, the correlations show no relationship between attachment and the frequency of online communication using SNS sites. At first sight, our results contradict previous findings (Oldmeadow et al., 2013) which stated that anxious individuals use more frequently SNS sites, while avoidant individuals use them less frequently, but it also might not be the case. We consider that the relationships we found can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, recent studies found that the frequency of SNS use could be explained by other variables beyond personal traits. Interpersonal relationships maintenance seems to predict a higher level of Facebook use, especially in university students (Tang et al., 2016). Also, the fear of missing out predicts Facebook use beyond the attachment style (Blackwell et al., 2017). Although these studies were not interested in Facebook (or other SNS) use between romantic partners, they still offer a different view on the situation. Facebook and other SNS sites have become integral parts of an individual’s daily life and the use of them is important because they allow for social exchanges and social connections. With everyone linked to the Internet, people might feel that the possibility of missing out is more salient than their
own personal characteristics and, as such, used SNS sites regardless of their traits. This may also be true in a romantic relationship, where at least some part of the daily online communication might be used as a device to control the fear of missing out or as an activity that contributes to relationship maintenance, regardless of a person’s level of insecure attachment. On the other hand, another explanation can be offered by the methodology that was used. The participants responded how often they communicate with their partner on SNS sites, but they did not indicate whether this communication was only between them or it was made on group chat where other people are involved. Also, more caution should be used when interpreting these results because communicating on SNS with the partner and using SNS in more general terms are similar but not identical. The previous studies (Oldmeadow et al., 2013) were interested in general SNS communication, while we measured only the communication with the romantic partner. Thus, the results might not be contradictory, but complementary. Moreover, the fact that there is a high average value for the frequency of communication should further impose caution in regards to such results.

In regards to the relationship between attachment and the quality of communication, the results largely support previous findings from the studies on offline communication (Feeney et al., 1994). Higher anxiety was related to lower quality of communication for men, but not for women. Men’s anxiety was associated with women’s lower quality of communication. Given that anxious individuals are overly dependent on their partners and that most partners are not able to respond correctly to their needs, the individuals might consider that the communication within the couple is of lower quality. In addition, their constant insistence can make the partner doubtful that they communicate in a productive way. However, only males seem to act in such a way. For women, anxiety can be seen more as a gender-role stereotype of relationship behavior and thus, as being less detrimental to the quality of communication (Feeney et al., 1994). Avoidance shows negative correlations with both actor and partner’s quality of communication, for both males and females. Avoidant individuals are uncomfortable with intimate communication and they might perceive SNS communication as a mere needful nuisance and thus not perceive it as of high quality. In turn, a person’s higher preference for less intimacy might determine the partner to perceive lower levels of communication quality.

Attachment avoidance was strongly correlated with relational satisfaction, with both males and females with higher avoidance reporting lower satisfaction. The same pattern was found for attachment anxiety. These results support previous findings (such as Hedden et al., 2014; Li & Chan, 2012). However, the partner effects were less conclusive. The correlational analysis showed that male anxiety and avoidance were associated with lower female satisfaction and that only female avoidance was associated with lower male satisfaction. However, when introduced in the more complex structural models, only female avoidance retained its significant association with male satisfaction. As such, it is possible that some other variables account for the associations between one person’s attachment insecurity and their partner’s relational satisfaction. Attachment
might influence satisfaction throughout multiple mediators, variables that were not taken into consideration by this study. Although with slightly different results, our study aligns with the current literature by discussing the existing patterns between insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction. We found these patterns to be consistent and negative. In addition, the magnitude of the effects shows that insecure attachment represents a pervasive danger for young couples, which supports the findings of other studies (Hedden et al., 2014). Given this situation, we consider that further studying the ways in which the negative effects of insecure attachment could be buffered represents a productive line of research.

One such mechanism could be a good and frequent communication. SNS communication quality and not its frequency was related to relational satisfaction. This was true for the actor and the partner associations. Previous studies, conducted on face-to-face (Emmers-Sommer, 2004) and online communication (Toma & Choi, 2016) tend to confirm these findings. Firstly, online communication reduces the possibility of expressing non-verbal cues and as such, accentuates the idealization of the partner, which makes online interaction appear as being of higher quality (Toma & Choi, 2016). Secondly, quality communication is associated with more intimacy and control, which, in turn, are important for satisfaction in a relationship (Emmers-Sommer, 2004).

The moderation analysis shows results that are more interesting. Firstly, the relationship between female avoidance and their own satisfaction was moderated by both the quality and the frequency of SNS communication (as measured by a couple index). Avoidant individuals are characterized by a lack of closeness to their partner and reduced levels of trust. Based on our results, higher communication quality on the SNS can lead to less detrimental effects of avoidance on satisfaction, which confirms our hypothesis. On the contrary, we predicted that a higher frequency of SNS communication would predict lower levels of satisfaction for avoidant individuals. Our results pointed to the opposite direction, thus our prediction was not validated. Previous studies show that good computer-mediated-communication (including communication on SNS) leads to increased levels of belongingness (Gardner et al., 2005). Moreover, constant communication using the SNS can make people feel more intimate and perceive their partners as being more responsive (compared to the situation when the communication is less frequent; Reis et al., 2011). Taken together, these results point to the fact that the communication on the SNS that has high levels of quality and is more frequent can increase the level of trust an avoidant female has in her partner. Thus, good and frequent communication using Facebook or Instagram might lead to a smaller decrease in satisfaction even when that female partner is high on avoidance. In regards to the partner effects, female avoidance and the couple level of communication frequency interact and predict lower levels of male satisfaction. Given that avoidant individuals have a more detached relationship with their partners, less frequent communication might accentuate the dissatisfaction on the part of the males, making them feel less important for the partner.
Higher levels of communication’s frequency and quality also have a buffering effect on the relationship between female anxiety and satisfaction, which confirms our hypothesis. Anxious individuals tend to be fearful and overly attached to their partner and the fear of losing him/her lowers their satisfaction. Also, they tend to use more technology-mediated communication in order to feel closer to their partner (Goodcase et al., 2018; Luo, 2014). Thus, it becomes understandable that the more frequent use of SNS to communicate with the partner would lead to a less severe effect of anxiety on their satisfaction. In this way, anxious females receive more frequent cues saying their partners are available and care for them. Also, SNS provides opportunities for both private and public communication (Tong & Westerman, 2016), through which the male partner has more opportunities to reinforce his affection for the anxious female partner. In regards to the beneficial role of quality communication for anxious females, it allows for better relational maintenance behaviors (Billedo et al., 2015), and thus leads to less damage to their satisfaction. One partner interaction effect was also found. Women’s satisfaction is less damaged by their partner’s anxiety when the couple communicates better.

Although we did not have a hypothesis regarding gender differences, most of the significant interactions are related to women’s attachment patterns. This may be due to the different ways men and women report the use of computer-mediated-communication for relational purposes. One study showed that CMC fits women’s expressive style of relationship maintenance better than men’s instrumental style of maintenance (Boneva et al., 2001). Thus, although attachment insecurity seems to affect men and women in similar ways (the regression coefficients were similar for both genders), women might consider that SNS communication (as a type of CMC) is better suited and has more value for them.

Limitations and Future Directions

Results of the present research are important because they show that online communication became an important part of the daily lives of young couples and that it can accentuate the detrimental effect that attachment insecurity has on satisfaction. To our knowledge, this is the first study that explores the problems of attachment, satisfaction, and communication on SNS sites using a complex APImoM Model. Still, some limitations must be addressed. Firstly, we have used a sample mostly made of university students. Although the participants are among the age group that uses SNS sites more frequently (Mcandrew & Jeong, 2012), social networks such as Facebook or Instagram have become more common among older individuals in recent years. It would be interesting to verify these relationships in an older sample. In addition, our sample was not very large and it is comprised of couples in different types of relationships. While some couples are in a long-distance relationship, others see each other on a daily basis or even live together. Although a sub-sample analysis can reveal more about the role SNS communication has in explaining the relationship between attachment and satisfaction, such an analysis would suffer in terms of validity in a smaller sample. Nevertheless, dyadic studies allow for new levels of
analysis but in order to draw a more valid conclusion, larger samples and causal (longitudinal or experimental) studies are needed.

Secondly, some of the variables could have been measured in other ways. The frequency of communication was measured using a single item. Still, it is hard to tell if every person considers the same actions as part of the communication process. Some may consider that by sending pictures or gifs they communicate with their partners, while others may think that communication appears when longer text messages are sent. Future research should differentiate between these types of responses.

Finally, we cannot exclude the possibility that the participants referred to the use of other types of social networking services (such as messaging applications like WhatsApp) when they responded to questions regarding the frequency and quality of SNS interactions. Although other studies usually refer to Facebook when discussing SNS (ex. Billedo et al., 2015; Tong & Westerman, 2016), future research must differentiate between the types of social networking services to measure their individual use and meaning in the interpersonal processes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to overcome some of the methodological limitations found in previous studies and to clarify the role of communication on SNS sites in the associations between attachment and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model was used to assess the moderation role of SNS communication quality and frequency. The results suggested that after controlling for background variables, attachment insecurities show strong associations with relational satisfaction (both actor and partner effects). The results add to the previous strong evidence regarding the negative role of attachment insecurity in shaping romantic interactions and relational satisfaction. In our sample, insecure men and women showed lower levels of satisfaction. However, the main contribution of this study is showing a new mechanism that can buffer the negative association between attachment and satisfaction. Both the quality and the frequency of SNS communication alter associations, reducing the pervasive effects of avoidance and anxiety, especially for women. These results are important because they shed some light on one of the less explored channels of couple communication (by using social network sites). Not only this, but they present a new mechanism that can be used by therapists and their clients that try to reduce the damages created by an insecure attachment style.

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Kvalitet ili učestalost komunikacije? Komunikacija na društvenim mrežama kao moderator odnosa između afektivne vezanosti i zadovoljstva vezom

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Onljain društvene mreže su vrlo važne za svakodnevni život jer nude brojne mogućnosti za komunikaciju. Parovi mogu imati koristi od novih mogućnosti (komunikacije, prim. prev.) i tako ostvariti više nivoa zadovoljstva u vezi. Neke psihološke karakteristike mogu da ometu vezu između onljain komunikacije i zadovoljstva (vezom, prim. prev.). Ova studija je osmišljena u cilju ispitivanja povezanosti između nesigurnih obrazaca afektivne vezanosti, komunikacije na društvenim mrežama i zadovoljstva u vezi. Pretpostavljeno je da je komunikacija na društvenim mrežama moderator veze između afektivne vezanosti i zadovoljstva vezom kod mladih rumunskih parova. Učestvovala su 73 para (146 učesnika). Strukturualno modelovanje korišćenjem Akter-partner Interdependence Moderated Model, APIMoM model) pokazalo je da su nesigurni obrasci afektivne vezanosti snažno povezani sa zadovoljstvom u vezi (efekat i kod aktera i kod partnera) i da je kvalitet i učestalost komunikacije na društvenim mrežama oblikuju ove odnose na različite načine. Rezultati ističu značaj komunikacije na društvenim mrežama i kako ona može odrediti različite obrasce zadovoljstva u vezi u zavisnosti od karakteristika afektivne vezanosti partnera.

*Ključne reči:* nesigurni obrasci afektivne vezanosti, zadovoljstvo u vezi, onljain komunikacija, APIMoM model

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