



Social relationships and information dissemination in virtual social network systems: An attachment theory perspective



Erez Yaakobi^{a,*}, Jacob Goldenberg^b

^a Ono Academic College, Kiryat Ono, Israel

^b Hebrew University, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 20 June 2014

Keywords:

Attachment
Web-based social networks
Social media dissemination of information

ABSTRACT

Web-based communication via social networking sites has become an integral method of communication, raising the question of whether the well-established Attachment Theory remains applicable to modern relationships. This communication shift is also likely to affect the information dissemination dynamic; i.e., how internal attachment working models relate to virtual modes of communication. Three studies (354 participants in total, median age 27) examined the applicability of Attachment Theory to web-based social network communications. Using self-report measures (Study 1) and an experimental simulation (Study 2), the results indicate that attachment security level predicts an individual's number of social ties and willingness to initiate web-based relationships. Secure individuals emerged as best situated to become social hubs. Study 3 reveals that a decrease in avoidance scores predicts an increased willingness to deliver information to others. Anxious participants exhibited less willingness to deliver highly threatening information but more willingness to deliver neutral information to others.

These findings support the applicability of attachment internal working models to predicting web-based social network communication, and suggest that Attachment Theory can be a predictor of the dynamics of web-based dissemination of information.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a significant shift in the nature of social interactions from face-to-face to web-based social communication. Studies show that web use as an alternative and even a substitute for face to face communication is expanding rapidly (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Ross et al., 2009; Stern, 2008; Taylor, McMinn, Bufford, & Chang, 2010). Social media such as Facebook have affected social relationships in ways that researchers are only beginning to understand. Attachment Theory is one major way of analyzing social interactions. Attachment Theory describes the dynamics of long-term relationships and has been implemented extensively as a starting point for understanding human behavior.

Attachment Theory identifies different personality orientations that are manifested in individuals' internal working models and conceptualized in terms of anxiety and avoidance. These orientations have consistently been found to be associated with specific aspects of social relationships including such traits as relationship qualities, self-disclosure in group settings, social information

processing, the tendency to embrace or avoid close relationships, and threat regulation strategies, to cite only a few (Dwyer et al., 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Saferstein, Neimeyer, & Hagans, 2005; Shechtman & Rybko, 2004).

Most studies drawing on Attachment Theory have been premised on the examination of face-to-face communication. The recent communication paradigm shift to web-based social network communications calls for a re-examination of the applicability of Attachment Theory.

The three studies reported below were designed to contribute to this relatively unexplored area and address the fundamental question of whether Attachment Theory is applicable in the world of today's communications. These studies examine how the characteristics of different attachment orientations, including the secure attachment approach, interdependence tendencies, anxious attachment hyper-activation strategies for threat regulation, and avoidance attachment social avoidance tendencies manifest in web-based social network systems such as popularly used social media.

2. Attachment orientation

The study of attachment was pioneered by the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1979, 1988). Bowlby's work examined and

* Corresponding author. Address: School of Management, Ono Academic College, 104 Zahal Street, Kiryat Ono, Israel. Tel.: +972 509 099 567; fax: +972 3 634 2184.
E-mail address: dr.yaakobi@ono.ac.il (E. Yaakobi).

emphasized the importance and impact of early attachment behaviors between child and caregiver as the basis for an individual's relationship interactions throughout life. This led to the development of the concept of internal working models that can be applied to new social situations, and therefore guide individuals' social perceptions and behaviors with others throughout life (Feeney, Cassidy, & Ramos-Marcuse, 2008). Bowlby's theory was empirically confirmed by numerous studies showing that early attachments influence other relationships and can predict an individual's behavior and interpersonal functioning in adulthood (Diamond & Fagundes, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996; Zimmermann, 2004). For example, there is extensive empirical evidence that early attachment orientations influence adults' relationships with friends (Berlin, Cassidy, & Appleyard, 2008; Feeney, 2008), adults' interactions with unfamiliar people (Roisman, 2006), and interactions with their peers (Allen, 2008).

Based on Bowlby's theory later developments by other researchers led to the current preferred reliable and valid measure of individual differences known as the Experiences in Close Relationships scale ("ECR") (e.g. Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), which categorizes individuals on two independent roughly orthogonal dimensions: (i) anxiety and (ii) avoidance. The anxiety dimension represents the extent to which individuals are concerned that a partner will not be available and responsive during their times of need. The avoidance dimension represents the extent to which individuals lack trust in their partners' goodwill and consequently strive to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals who score low on either the attachment anxiety and/or the avoidant attachment dimensions are generally more secure and have a tendency to utilize constructive and effective affect-regulation strategies. On the other hand, individuals who score high on either or both of these dimensions tend to suffer from attachment insecurities and rely on hyper-activation or deactivation to cope with threats (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988).

High avoidance relationship patterns include maintaining interpersonal distance from others (Gillath et al., 2006), a tendency to be self-reliant, and fleeing from emotional situations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In contrast, individuals with high anxiety place a great deal of importance on relationships and are strongly motivated to form them; they have proximity goals and over-rely on proximity-seeking tendencies in their relationships, accompanied by ambivalence in relationships and high fear of abandonment by others (De-Witte & De-Houwer, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Mikulincer, Shaver, Bar-On, & Ein-Dor, 2010).

Most of the studies that have examined attachment orientation and communication have examined face to face interactions. They found that avoidant (vs. secure) individuals have weaker communication skills with friends, as manifested for example, in withdrawal behaviors (Shomaker & Furman, 2009). These individuals are likely to have difficulty communicating openly and constructively about emotional topics, employ deactivating affect regulation strategies aimed at minimizing hurt and distress from others (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Dozier & Kobak, 1992) and exhibit a decreased willingness to self-disclose (Gillath et al., 2006; Shechtman & Rybko, 2004).

Empirical research has also shown that the level of security associated with individual working models was significantly correlated with social information processing (Dwyer et al., 2010). These authors found a relationship between lower levels of security and more maladaptive social information processing among early adolescent boys and girls. This was revealed, for example, in an increase in erroneous attributions to others' behaviors due to insecure attachments. Thus the goals of individuals with anxiety or avoidant models may also impact their decisions as to which and how much information to disseminate to others.

3. Social network communications and the web

Information dissemination studies have shown that social groups are structured around a small number of influential individuals with many friends who enjoy above-average social power and can sway the attitudes, opinions, decisions and actions of other group members. Highly influential individuals are characterized by one or a combination of three independent traits: strong social communication skills (e.g. charisma, empathy), expertise (in their field), and social connectivity (many social ties) (Goldenberg, Han, & Lehmann, 2010).

A social hub can be described as a person connected to a large number of other people in a network. Hub's extensive social connections can create an invisible yet powerful network of interpersonal communications that ultimately lead to significant changes in their social system including which information will be disseminated as a function of individual members' role as an information source (Goldenberg, Lehmann, Shidlovski, & Matser-Barak, 2006). A hub's central role in the dissemination and flow of information in social systems makes it crucial to identify and predict who is likely to become one. Goldenberg et al. (2010) argued that because these connections function as pathways on which socially relevant information is transmitted and shared, the quantity of ties represents a hub's social connectivity.

In a study that examined the association between personality and internet use based on Eysenck's personality dimensions, psychoticism was the only personality dimension related to establishing new relationships and having "internet only" friends, whereas extroversion was the only personality dimension related to maintaining long-distance relationships and supporting daily face-to-face relationships (Tosun & Lajunen, 2010). Correa, Hinsley, and de Zúñiga (2010) investigated the relationship between extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experiences of the Big-Five model and the use of social networking sites (in particular SMS). The authors found that although extraversion and openness to experiences were positively related to social media use, emotional stability was a negative predictor when controlling for socio-demographics and life satisfaction. These findings differed for gender and age. Extraverted men and women were both likely to be more frequent users of social media tools, but only men with greater degrees of emotional instability were more regular users. The relationship between extraversion and social media use was particularly strong among the young adult cohort. Conversely, being open to new experiences emerged as an important personality predictor of social media use for the more mature segment of the sample. Ross et al. (2009) found that the Big Five personality factor was weakly related to Facebook use. Based on Ross et al.'s study, Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) found a stronger connection between personality and Facebook behavior by measuring the user-information upload on Facebook.

Buote, Wood and Pratt (2009) showed that secure individuals had more off-line as well as on-line friends as compared to *insecure* (high on anxiety and/or avoidance) individuals. However, they did not test the applicability of Attachment Theory to online interactions or examine how the type of information disseminated affected the type of information each attachment orientation was willing to deliver to others.

Here it should be noted that there are distinct and material differences between non-face-to-face social systems such as web social systems such as social media, on one hand, and face-to-face human interactions, on the other. Non-face-to-face social systems are distinctive in that they afford their users a relatively anonymous medium as well as the provision of group venues where individuals can meet others with similar interests and values (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Thus, the current research which examines the association between Attachment Theory and web-based social

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات