SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG FIRST-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO: ATTACHMENT STYLES AS A MEDIATING FACTOR

By

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MINI DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I, Grace Nethathe hereby declare that ***Social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction among first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo: Attachment styles as mediating factor*****,** hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of MA Clinical Psychology has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

nethathe

02/04/2025

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Signature **Date**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between Social Media Maintenance Expectations (SMME), Relationship Satisfaction (RS), and Attachment Styles among first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo. The research aimed to understand the mediating role of attachment styles and explore the factors influencing RS within the context of social media use. The data were collected through surveys and analysed using mediation analysis and ordinal regression models.

The findings revealed several important insights. First, higher attachment styles were positively associated with increased RS (P *Za* = 0.002 < 0.05), even when controlling for SMME. This highlights the significance of attachment orientations in predicting RS among first-year Psychology students. Second, individuals with anxious attachment styles tended to have higher expectations for social media maintenance. This suggests that attachment styles influence individuals' perceptions of how relationships should be maintained on social media platforms. Furthermore, SMME played a significant role in influencing RS, independently of the mediating effect of attachment styles. The more an individual’s SMME were met, the higher their RS.

These findings highlight the importance of considering attachment styles and SMME in understanding relationship dynamics and developing interventions to promote healthy and satisfying relationships among first-year Psychology students. Recommendations include attachment-aware relationship interventions, education on healthy social media use, support for relationship building, continued research and evaluation, and promoting relationship quality awareness. By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions and counselling centres can provide

effective interventions and support systems to enhance relationship quality and well-being among first-year university students.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Ndiwavho Nethathe. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother Randima Florence, who has been a dedicated support system for me throughout my journey of studying and training to be a clinical psychologist. Furthermore, I dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Tshepo Rakheila, who fell and rose with me through the journey of authoring this work.

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LIST OF SPECIAL SYMBOLS

Beta β

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient

$$r = \frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum (y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Logistic Regression

$$logit(P(Y \leq j)) = \beta_{0_j} + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \ldots + \beta_k x_{\beta_1 x_k}$$

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ECR	Experiences in Close Relationships
ECR-R	Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised
RAS	Relationship Assessment Scale
RS	Relationship Satisfaction
SMME	Social Media Maintenance Expectations

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Studies have shown that human beings need to be in relationships and that the way individuals are attached in their early years becomes a template for how individuals manage relationships in adulthood (Gillath et al., 2016; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In addition, Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) noted that this is the same throughout the lifespan. There are differences in the ways that individuals are attached, including secure and insecure (anxious and avoidant) attachments. Luo (2014) and Drouin and Landgraff (2012) report that attachment influences people's personalities within relationships.

Other studies have shown that communication through technology has become part of our everyday lives and that an increasing number of people are communicating using technology in their romantic relationships, specifically through texting. These studies include studies by Pierce (2009), Chemnad et al. (2023) and Weisskirch and Delevi (2013), who stated that an increasing number of people are making use of social networks and the use of text messages when communicating. The use of social networks to communicate in relationships has given partners greater access to each other, as it is now easier for romantic partners to contact each other.

Additionally, Burgoon (1993), Hall and Baym (2012) and Campbell and Murray (2015) found that when people engage in communication using their mobile phones, they hold

expectations about these interactions in their relationships. These expectations are defined as social media maintenance expectations (SMME). From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that attachment styles influence relationships throughout life, how people communicate, the expectations people hold as they communicate, as well as the satisfaction people derive from their relationships based on whether their SMME are met.

Based on all the studies done to date, a study of the influence of attachment styles on SMME and the satisfaction individuals derive from their relationships founded on these expectations being met is valuable. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the relationship between SMME and relationship satisfaction (RS) of first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo students and the mediating role that attachment styles play in the relationship between the two variables.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

How people communicate using technology has both a positive and negative impact on human relationships. Off (2016) asserts that one of the aspects that influence how technology affects romantic relationships is how individuals are attached, as this influences how individuals communicate via technology. A study of how SMME contribute to expectations in a friendship and the satisfaction with a friendship was conducted by Hall and Baym (2012). In addition, a study of how texting and the way individuals are attached contribute to RS was carried out by Luo (2014). It can be inferred from the aforementioned studies that the more that friends communicate using social media, the

more their SMME increase, and the higher their SMME the lower their satisfaction with their friendship.

The ease with which partners have access to each other results in them having higher communication expectations, because they can remain connected regardless of time and place (Chemnad et al., 2023). Furthermore, the more communication expectations one partner has, the more difficult it becomes for the other partner to meet these expectations, which results in a decline in RS. The aforementioned studies are not South African studies, however, and the focus was on friendships and on a single perspective, and not the perspective of both individuals concerned. This study expands on the research already carried out by looking at whether the results obtained in these studies will be similar in the context of a romantic relationship. In addition, the study looks beyond the perspective of only one partner and includes the perspective of both partners. This study is also a merge between the results of the study of Luo (2014) and Hall and Baym (2012).

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to educate individuals on how the attachment styles they have formed influence the expectations they have whilst they communicate with their partners using social media. The focus is on educating individuals on how the expectations they hold as they text are influenced by their attachment styles. In addition, the study educates individuals on how their satisfaction in relationships is influenced by their social maintenance expectations being met, and that the extent to which their expectations are met is based in turn on how they are attached. The study aims to help individuals choose

relationships in which they will be more satisfied with how their partners communicate with them.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to determine the relationship between SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo, and the mediating role that attachment styles play between the two variables.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the demographic characteristics of first-year Psychology students.
2. To assess the attachment styles that the first-year Psychology students have within their romantic relationships.
3. To identify the types of social media used by first-year Psychology students within romantic relationships.
4. To assess the social media maintenance expectations that first-year Psychology students have within romantic relationships.
5. To assess the relationship satisfaction of first-year Psychology students.
6. To determine the relationship between social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction among first-year Psychology students.
7. To determine the mediating role that the different attachment styles play between social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of the study are:

1. What are the attachment styles of first year Psychology students?
2. What social media is commonly used by first year Psychology students in romantic relationships?
3. What communication expectations through social media do first year Psychology students have of their romantic partners?
4. Are first year Psychology students satisfied or not satisfied with their romantic relationships?
5. How do the attachment styles of first year Psychology students influence the type of social media they choose to communicate with in their romantic relationship?
6. Is the extent to which first year Psychology students are satisfied or not satisfied with their romantic relationship influenced by the meeting of their communication expectations?
7. What is the influence of attachment styles on the relationship between communication expectations through social media and relationship satisfaction?

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Attachment: This is a natural and adaptive developmental system of behaviours, cognitions and affects that organises the exploration and proximity seeking of the attached individual to the attachment figure in both ordinary and emergency situations

(Pittman et al., 2011). For this study, the above definition was adopted in relation to attachment between romantic partners.

Avoidant attachment: This is a form of attachment in which individuals seek emotional distance, are distant to partners, have a lack of trust of their partners and display a dependence upon themselves (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Anxious attachment: It can be argued that anxious attachment is the opposite of avoidant attachment, as individuals who are anxiously attached prefer to have a proximity to their partners and have an excessive dependence on their partners; as such, they always have a fear of their partners leaving them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Social media maintenance expectations: These are expectations that people hold for maintaining their relationships as they communicate using social media (Hall & Baym, 2012). For this study, the above definition will be adapted in relation to mobile maintenance expectations that individuals have when texting with their romantic partners.

Relationship satisfaction: This is a person's overall evaluation of his or her relationship. This may entail, for example, the extent to which an individual's expectations are met (Gerlach & Reinhard, 2018). For this study, the above definition was adapted in relation to individuals' satisfaction with their relationship based on their mobile maintenance expectations being met by their partner.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a correlational study. According to Simon and Goes (2011), the objective of a correlational study is to ascertain if a relationship exists between variables and to devise a regression equation that can be used to make predictions about the general population. Regression analysis was used to determine the mediating role that attachment styles play between SMME and RS. This was achieved using mediation analysis, which analyses the influence that an independent variable (mobile maintenance expectations) has on a dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) through the influence of a mediating variable (attachment styles).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations allow the researcher to consider the safety of those who participate in their study. In this study, ethical considerations were regarded to ensure the avoidance of harm toward the first-year Psychology students. The ethical considerations included are informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, avoiding biasness, anonymity, avoidance of harm, beneficence, respect, and dignity and standard of care.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 – provides a comprehensive introduction to the study, what it aims to achieve and highlights its significance.

Chapter 2 – provides an overview of the literature on the topic of the study and also provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks upon which the study is founded.

Chapter 3 – provides an overview of the methodology used in the study.

Chapter 4 – entails the presentation of the results.

Chapter 5 – presents the results of the study and conclusions drawn from the results.

Chapter 6 – Provides a discussion of the results of the study as they relate to literature, limitations, and recommendations of the study.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the study. The researcher provided a comprehensive introduction of the study, the research problem, the purpose, and significance of the study. It was noted that individuals form attachments from an early age that continue to determine the structure of their relationships. Moreover, it was noted that within romantic relationships individuals communicate immensely using social media. In addition, as individuals communicate using social media, they develop SMME, which in turn influence the extent to which they are satisfied with their relationship. The subsequent chapter will examine the relevant literature about social media use in romantic relationships, attachment, SMME and RS.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a broad, balanced overview of the existing literature related to the proposed research topic. It will entail an overview of literature on the extent to which technology became an integral part of communication; moreover, how attachment styles influence the choice of methods of communication used by individuals and how individuals communicate using these methods. This will be followed by an overview of literature about the ways in which individuals hold expectations in relationships and how these expectations are consequently seen as individuals communicate via social media. Lastly, an overview of literature will be presented on how the expectations individuals hold as they communicate via social media influence satisfaction with their relationships depending on how these individuals are attached.

Furthermore, this chapter aims to present the theoretical frameworks upon which the study is founded. Two theories were used in this research study, namely, the attachment theory and the equity theory. The theories were used to understand how the way individuals are attached influences the relationship maintenance expectations that they develop as they communicate through social media. In addition, the theories were used to understand how individuals are satisfied with their relationships based on how they are attached, and the extent to which their relationship maintenance expectations are met as they communicate through social media. Each theory is discussed based on its

philosophical underpinnings and assumptions, after which a discussion of the rationale as to why the theory is relevant to the study is presented.

2.2 TECHNOLOGY USE AND ATTACHMENT

As more people are using technology to communicate in their romantic relationships, studies on romantic relationships and communication via technology are of significant importance in the context of today's world (Off, 2016). Furthermore, Reed et al. (2015) and Pierce (2009) stated that although intimacy in romantic relationships was previously determined by face-to-face communication, social media in its various forms is now important for the initiation, maintenance, and negotiation of relationships. This is supported by Luo and Tuney (2015), who identified communication as important in maintaining romantic relationships. According to Morey et al. (2013), technology has become the common means by which romantic partners communicate with each other.

The rise of technology use within romantic relationships is further supported by Skierkowski and Wood (2012), who stated that based on observations it is apparent that mobile phones have penetrated almost every aspect of interpersonal relationships in an apparent fuse of humanity and technology. From the aforementioned it is evident that technology – more specifically, mobile phones – are the means by which romantic partners communicate within their relationships. According to Ishii (2006), mobile phones have become an integral part of daily life, especially for young people. Mobile phones are used for making phone calls and texting (Hall & Baym, 2012). Furthermore, McAulay (2022) stated that social media has become a popular method of communication amongst

individuals, with the use of social media being more prevalent amongst young adults than the older generations.

According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), attachments formed within relationships are important throughout the lifespans of individuals and there are significant templates for romantic relationships in adulthood. The afore mentioned is supported by Stănculescu et al. (2021), who identified that adult attachment persistently affects patterns and quality of relationships. Weisskirch (2012) stated that the way individuals are attached influences the method they use to communicate and how often they communicate using that method. This is supported by Morey et al. (2013), who stated that attachment styles are a representation of stable behavioural patterns within close relationships.

According to Weisskirch (2012), research in attachment has resulted in a consensus that attachment varies along the avoidance and anxiety dimension. Individuals who are avoidantly attached seek emotional distance in their relationships and depend on themselves, as they have a lack of trust for any other person but themselves (Morey et al., 2013). According to Drouin and Landgraff (2012), the anxiously attached individuals seek to be close to their partners and they are constantly fearful of their partners leaving them; in addition, they seek to be approved by others and always want their needs for proximity to be met. Communication with romantic partners varies depending on how individuals are attached (Weisskirch, 2012).

This study focused specifically on texting within the confines of a romantic relationship. According to Luo (2014), texting has over time become a mainstream method of communication. According to Luo and Tuney (2015), texting is the act of sending and receiving messages between mobile devices or any other device over different phone networks. Young adults are far more likely to use texting in their close relationships compared to older people (Luo, 2014). This, according to Drouin and Landgraff (2012), may be due to the convenience and accessibility that texting holds for the young adult population. Moreover, Skierkowski and Wood (2012) asserted that texting allows individuals to stay connected to their social network from any place or situation in which the technology they are using is supported. Arikewuyo et al. (2021) assert that the use of social media to communicate is determined by the strength of ties between individuals; and, furthermore, that frequent communication via social media strengthens the ties that exist between individuals. In addition, a study conducted by Stănculescu et al. (2021) has identified that social media is a more accessible way to communicate in comparison to face-to-face communication.

Research has found the following with respect to attachment and texting. Schade et al. (2013) discovered that when individuals text to express affection for their partners, this results in a higher partner attachment for men and women. According to the study done by Weisskirch (2012), anxious attachment was found to be highly related to more frequent texting. This is supported by Luo (2014), who found that texting allows anxious individuals to maintain constant contact with their partners. According to Boustead (2021), texting is beneficial for the anxiously attached individuals who have a negative self-image, require constant reassurance, and have an excessive need for closeness. Morey et al. (2013)

found avoidant attachment to be less correlated with phone calls and texting and to be correlated more with email. This was supported by studies carried out by Morey et al. (2013) and Weisskirch (2012), who found that individuals with high avoidance scores communicate significantly less whilst using a phone.

According to Luo (2014), texting assists anxiously attached individuals to remain in contact with their partners and make them feel at ease, as this helps them to feel much closer to their partners. The aforementioned can be considered to be the reason behind anxiously attached individuals communicating more through text. Furthermore, it can be assumed that as avoidant individuals seek distance, they communicate less, and this may be the reason behind them texting less.

2.3 EXPECTATIONS

According to Burgoon (1993), when individuals engage in communication with other people, they hold an expectation of how those people will perform. According to Burgoon (1993), expectancy in communication designates expected patterns of behaviour that a person holds for a group of individuals or for a specific individual. Communication expectations arise from the following characteristics: communicator characteristics, relationship characteristics and, lastly, content characteristics (Burgoon, 1993).

According to Burgoon (1993), communicator characteristics are individual factors such as communication style that influence how an individual will expect another individual to communicate with them; relationship characteristics are factors that account for the

relationship that exists between two individuals, e.g., the level of attraction; and context characteristics entail factors of the environment, such as its privacy, that determine interaction behaviours that individuals will exhibit in such an environment.

This study focused on expectations that individuals have as they communicate with their partners via mobile phones – what Hall and Baym (2012) named mobile maintenance expectations. This study focused on texting through social media via mobile phones; as such, mobile maintenance expectations will be referred to as social media maintenance expectations (SMME). According to Hall and Baym (2012), these are expectations that people hold for maintaining their relationships using mobile phones, and this maintenance can be attained by, for example, using text messages. Through SMME individuals expect to have full updates and to feel included in the daily life and activities of the person they are communicating with (Hall & Baym, 2012).

2.4 RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

According to Luo (2014), attachment and texting can be expected to influence the outcomes of relationships. Beukeboom and Pollmann (2021) assert that mobile phones have an influence on the dynamics of romantic relationships. According to Off (2016), relationships can be impacted both positively and negatively using technology to communicate, as the way individuals communicate using technology influences how their needs of intimacy are met by their partners. The aforementioned is supported by Stöven and Herzberg (2021) who states that individuals chose how they use to satisfy their needs within relationships. Ohadi et al. (2018) assert that similarity in texting behaviour between

partners, such as frequency of texting, influences the satisfaction they derive from their relationships. This is supported by Emmers-Sommer (2004), who found that partners with a higher frequency of contact experienced more satisfaction with their relationships; in their study, relational talk was positively correlated with relationship intimacy at .51, and satisfaction with interactions was positively correlated with RS at .28 and relationship intimacy at .47.

A study by Schade (2013), in which a mediation was carried out between attachment behaviours and RS, indicated that attachment behaviours were universally associated with RS and stability for men and women. The aforementioned is supported by Liu et al. (2021) who noted that relationship satisfaction is moderated by individuals' attachment styles. Off (2016) found a negative correlation between anxious attachment and RS, thus, anxious attachment is associated with lower levels of RS. This could be because anxiously attached individuals perceived that their intimacy needs were not met in their communication via technology with their partner.

Morey et al. (2013) found that anxiously attached individuals derived greater satisfaction with their relationships when they texted more with their romantic partners. However, that was not the case for the avoidantly attached individuals, who were identified by Riggs et al. (2019) to withdraw from communication. This finding, which indicated that avoidantly attached individuals are satisfied with minimal texting from their partners, was also found by Drouin and Landgraff (2012). Off (2016) found that anxiously attached individuals

viewed technology as playing a role in enhancing intimacy in their relationships; however, this was again not the case for avoidantly attached individuals.

Luo (2014) found that individuals in romantic relationships who communicated regularly with each other using mobile phones made their partners feel more certain of their relationships and the love and commitment of their partner. Emmers-Sommer (2004) found that partners with a higher frequency of contact experienced more satisfaction with their relationships. This is supported by Morey et al. (2013), who found that individuals who had frequent communication in their relationships had a more positive perception of their relationships, indicating a higher satisfaction with their relationships and intimacy.

It is important to note that the studies referred to in this study have a focus on short-term effects or cross-sectional data. The results obtained were obtained from studies conducted in a brief period of time, whereby participants filled in questionnaires once with one or two follow ups done within a year or two. The studies highlighted the influence of social media use on relationship expectations and relationship over a brief time span. This is identified in studies done by Luo (2014), Luo et al. (2015), Weisskirch (2012) and more in which data was collected within a year to approximately 2 years as highlighted within the methods sections of the studies. The studies used self-report measures that participants often completed once to reflect how they use social media in their relationships and the expectations and satisfaction they have within their relationships. The same is observed within this study in which data was collected within a year using self-report measures that participant completed in one take. Therefore, it would be

beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study and observe if the same pattern of results will be obtained as more time passes and participants are repeatedly assessed as the nature of the participants' relationship changes.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a review of literature on the attachment styles that individuals have within their relationships, as well as of the nature in which technology over time has become an integral part of communication in romantic relationships. The literature also provided insight into the expectations that individuals hold as they communicate using technology based on their attachment styles. In addition, the review of literature looked into the resultant satisfaction that individuals derive from their communication expectations being met.

The next chapter will present the theoretical frameworks which underpin this research study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explicates the foundation of the study, namely the theoretical frameworks on which this study is founded, referencing the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth carried out on attachment and the attachment styles that individuals form as a result. In addition, this chapter explores the work conducted by Burgoon on expectations that individuals hold as they communicate.

3.2 BOWLBY AND AINSWORTH'S ATTACHMENT THEORY

The attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth posits that how individuals interact within relationships earlier on in life becomes a template for how individuals construct and maintain relationships throughout life. According to Collins and Feeney (2000), care and support given by a caregiver are essential for the development of trust and feeling secure in close relationships. Bowlby asserted that people are born with a need to be close to individuals with whom they are attached and that this is hardwired in individuals to ensure their survival (Gillath et al., 2016).

According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), as individuals continuously use their attachment systems in relationships, they develop working models of others, in particular, how attachment figures respond to them. Moreover, they form working models of themselves, especially with regard to what they perceive as their value and efficacy.

Individuals use these working models in their attempts to seek proximity and protection from their attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The attachment theory asserts that how people relate to those whom they are attached to early on in life determines how they function in their adult relationships (Gillath et al., 2016). For example, if individuals experience distress when separated from a parent, this is how individuals will react when separated from a romantic partner. Gillath et al. (2016) asserted that as individuals move through different phases in life, their primary attachment figures change. As such, it can therefore be expected that as individuals enter the stage of young adulthood and they engage in romantic relationships, their romantic partners become significant attachment figures.

While an awareness exists, that individuals form attachments in their earlier relationships, there are differences in the way that individuals are attached, and these differences can be seen in the work done by Ainsworth. This is supported by Zahra (2022), who stated that attachment styles are rooted in relationships with primary caregivers, as this is the first social bonding that creates a template for how a child interacts in other social and romantic relationships. Ainsworth observed that securely attached infants showed distress when isolated from their mother but recovered quickly to continue exploring their environment when reunited with their mother, as these infants have working models which affirm their success in obtaining closeness and protection when they seek it (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The avoidant infants showed little or no distress when separated from their mother and barely acknowledged them upon their return, as these infants have learned to depend upon themselves due to not obtaining closeness and protection when they sought it (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The anxious infants, on the other hand, showed extreme distress when separated from their mother and displayed confusion upon their mothers' return, as they may be both resistant to their mothers' attention and cling to it simultaneously (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

From the above observations, a self-report measure of attachment styles was developed by Hazan and Shaver, who asked individuals to place themselves in various categories depending on the dominant feelings and behaviours in their romantic relationships after being given the different descriptions thereof (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2016), individuals who are secure in their relationships find comfort in being close to other people and do not have a fear of abandonment, as they are independent yet allow themselves to depend on others and have others depend on them.

The avoidant individuals do not feel comfortable being close to other people, as they have a lack of trust for others and instead depend on themselves and prefer it to be that way. The anxious individuals, contrary to avoidant individuals, want to be very close to people, a need which might be excessive at times, and they have a constant worry that their partners will leave them. Morey et al. (2013) asserted that the attachment theory provides

a useful framework for understanding individual differences in the way in which romantic partners communicate via technology.

3.3 RATIONALE FOR EMBEDDING THE STUDY IN THE ATTACHMENT THEORY

The attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth is used in this study. Bowlby founded the attachment theory on the notion of the necessity of attachment for survival and that the templates of attachment that individuals form continue to influence them throughout life. Ainsworth expanded research on attachment and discovered differences in the way that individuals are attached.

3.4 CRITICISMS OF USING THE ATTACHMENT THEORY IN THE STUDY

The attachment theory basis the ability of individuals to form and maintain relationships to be solely influenced by how the primary caregivers of individuals relate to them. The theory negates the role that an individual plays in how they relate to their primary caregivers in early life and how in turn this can go on to influence how their caregivers relate to them. Furthermore, theory can be said to further negate how the templates individuals have for relationships in later life can be influenced by how they relate to their primary caregivers. The theory can be viewed to be limiting in considering an individual as whole in how they interact and maintain their relationships throughout their life.

3.5 EQUITY THEORY

Attachment styles have been identified to have a significant impact in individuals' approach to relationships. It can be argued from this that the way individuals are attached influences what individuals expect in their relationships. This can be explained based on

equity theory. According to Hatfield and Rapson (2011), this theory asserts that there are two things that individuals pay attention to whilst they are in a relationship, i.e., whether the relationship is rewarding and, secondly, whether there is equality in the relationship. Hatfield and Rapson (2011) stated that equal relationships are perceived to be healthier than unequal relationships.

According to Johnson et al. (2008), to gain an understanding of why individuals use different channels of communication in their relationships the equity theory can be used, and that whatever mode of communication they use ensures that the relationship is equal and rewarding for both parties. When a partner starts to communicate in a way that makes another partner feel as if they are not deriving the benefits of the relationship, such as not responding to a text message from a romantic partner, this in turn affects their satisfaction levels in a relationship.

3.6 RATIONALE FOR EMBEDDING THE STUDY IN THE EQUITY THEORY

The equity theory upon which this study is embedded demonstrates the importance of equality within relationships for satisfaction within relationships. Within this study, the equality focused on is the equality in meeting mobile maintenance expectations which determine satisfaction within relationships.

3.7 CRITICISMS OF USING THE EQUITY THEORY IN THE STUDY

The equity theory places an importance on the role of fairness in relationships. Fairness on the basis of theory is deemed to be based on an individual getting what they contribute to a relationship. However, it can be argued that this one-dimensional view is limiting as

for some individual's fairness is not getting what they put in. Fairness for some individuals in defined by their culture, socioeconomic status, and other factors. For example, some women are taught from an early age that their role is to care for their home and the man to provide. As long as a man is providing for his family, and a woman cares for their home there is perceived fairness in the union despite how a man may spend less time with his woman or have limited communication with his woman and vice versa.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a broad, balanced overview of the theories that were used as frameworks for the study. The chapter highlighted that the way individuals communicate in romantic relationships has evolved over time, with more people making use of social media through texting to engage with their partners. With more individuals communicating through texting, it has become evident that the extent to which individuals' text is linked to the attachment styles of individuals as founded on the attachment theory. In addition, it was identified that the way individuals are attached influences the extent to which they are satisfied with their romantic relationships.

Moreover, it was identified that individuals have expectations as they communicate with other individuals via texting based on the equity theory. Furthermore, these expectations are seen to be influenced by the way individuals are attached. The researcher justified the use of the attachment theory and the equity theory and provided a rationale for their appropriateness for the current study. The researcher also provided criticisms levelled against the use of the theories used as the framework of the study. The next chapter

discusses the research methodology used in this investigation and will also examine the analytical procedures employed.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodology used to investigate SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students, with attachment styles as mediating factor. The chapter is divided into several sections, including the study design, sample, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.2 STUDY DESIGN

The study is a quantitative study which made use of the experimental correlational design. According to Simon and Goes (2011), the objective of a correlational study is to ascertain if a relationship exists between variables, and to devise a regression equation which can be used to make predictions pertaining to the general population. The relationship that is of significance in this study is the relationship between SMME and RS. Data was collected at a single point in time from the university students using surveys. The study used self-report questionnaires to gather data on the attachment styles, SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Limpopo.

4.3 SAMPLE

A population is defined as a set of people with whom the required information to conduct research will be obtained and whom the results of the research will be applied to (Shukla,

2020). The purposive sampling technique was used to source the sample for this investigation. According to Maree (2007), the method is used in situations in which there is a need for a particular sample, e.g., research on the attitudes of married women between the ages of 21 and 30 years on abortion. This study does not have a prescribed age range as students of different ages can be a first-year Psychology student however, the expectation is that most of the participants will be between the ages of 18 and 25. The method allows for the narrowing of a sample to fit a particular research purpose.

The inclusion criteria used to select university students were as follows:

- Capability to consent to participating in the research study.
- University students had to be first-year registered students at the University of Limpopo in the 2022 academic year.
- University students had to be studying a BA degree with a major in Psychology.

The criteria used to exclude university students were:

- Refusal or inability to consent to being a participant.
- Registered for another degree that does not have Psychology as a major module.
- University students' inability to identify themselves as registered first-year Psychology students.
- Non-University of Limpopo students.

The sample for this study consisted of 190 university students enrolled for Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Limpopo. This includes 134 first year

Psychology students, 26 second year Psychology students, 14 third year Psychology students, 11 fourth year Psychology students and 05 fifth year Psychology students. The participation of other levels of study further limited an already small sample which impacts the ability to generalise the results of the study. The sample was selected using a random sampling technique. The study used self-report questionnaires to gather data on attachment styles, SMME and RS among the first-year Psychology students who consented to partake. The sampling method was limiting in that only students registered for psychology were considered which can be argued to be a limited representation of the students at the University of Limpopo. The restricted sample makes it hard to then generalise the results of the study to a wider population. In addition, the sample greatly consisted of young adults and relationship dynamics such commitment levels may differ between young adults and long-term and married couples. Therefore, the aforementioned can be considered a limitation in generalising the results of the study to a wider population.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE AND TOOLS

Data was collected using self-report questionnaires that first-year Psychology students completed online using Google forms. It is essential to note that the use of self-report questionnaires introduced a bias to the study as participants may have over or underestimated their responses. Furthermore, the use of online forms accessible to all students resulted in other students in various levels of study responding to the questionnaires. The questionnaires entailed several sections, including demographic information, SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students. As a result, the overall

number of participants did not purely include first year Psychology students. The questionnaires were developed based on a review of the relevant literature and were pilot tested prior to the main study to ensure their reliability and validity. The study used the following questionnaire to collect data:

4.4.1 Experiences in Closed Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire (Q1 – Q36)

The ECR-R was used to assess the attachment styles of the first-year Psychology students. The ECR-R self-report instrument is a widely used measure that assesses adult attachment styles within close relationships. It was developed as a revised version of the original Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale, specifically designed to capture individuals' attachment-related experiences and behaviours in their romantic relationships. The ECR-R consists of items that assess two dimensions of attachment: anxiety and avoidance. Individuals respond to statements related to their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours in romantic relationships, providing insights into their attachment orientations. The ECR-R has been utilised in numerous studies to understand the impact of attachment styles on relationship dynamics, satisfaction, and well-being.

The original ECR scale was developed by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver in 1998. It was later revised by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) as the ECR-R which measures both secure and insecure attachments (avoidant and anxious). According to Fairchild and Finney (2006), the ECR-R is a measure that comprises 36 items and is used to assess adult attachment. According to Fairchild and Finney (2006), there are two subscales that make up the ECR-R, namely, anxiety and avoidance. An example of an item that makes up the anxiety subscale is: 'I often worry that my romantic partner does not love me.' An example of an item that makes up the avoidance subscale is: 'I struggle allowing myself to depend on romantic partners. First-year Psychology students rate the 36 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The ECR-R was found to have both construct and criterion validity and to produce high reliability coefficients. It is thus expected that the results obtained from the instrument will be valid and reliable. The parallel scales in the new and old scales were found to correlate with each other. Sibley et al. (2005) found the ECR-R measures of anxiety and avoidance to be strongly positively correlated at $r\ (298) = .48$, $p < .001$. Additionally, both scales were found to have a high internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha at 0.91 for the anxiety scale and 0.94 for the avoidance scale, respectively (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Fairchild & Finney, 2006; Zavattini & Busonera, 2017). The ECR-R has been found to be reliable and valid in other countries however, no evidence was found of adapting the scale for use with the South African population.

4.4.2 Social Media Maintenance Expectations Scale (Q1 – Q9)

Social media maintenance expectations were assessed through the SMME scale. Social media maintenance expectations refer to individuals' beliefs, expectations, and behaviours regarding how they should interact with their romantic partners or close relationships on social media platforms. It encompasses various aspects, including frequency of communication, display of affection, public validation, monitoring of partners' activities, and sharing of personal information online, and reflects the role that social media plays in relationship maintenance and the expectations individuals have regarding their partner's involvement on these platforms. Understanding SMME can shed light on how social media usage influences relationship dynamics, satisfaction, and potentially conflicts within close relationships.

The SMME scale was adapted from the work of Hall and Baym (2012), who asserted that the items of the scale assess interaction, inclusion, and mundane relational maintenance. According to Hall and Baym (2012), the items of the scale are based upon routine, daily and mundane activities, e.g., ‘My friend expects me to text throughout the day to update them on how my day is going’. Hall and Baym (2012) asserted that the items were found to have a reliability of (α = .93). The above adapted scale was used to assess SMME in a friendship. Accordingly, in this study it was adapted to fit the context of a romantic relationship. There is no evidence for the adaptation of the scale for use within the South African context.

4.4.3 Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Q1 – Q7)

Overall satisfaction with a relationship was assessed using the RAS. Assessing satisfaction within relationships refers to the measurement of individuals' subjective evaluation of their relationship experiences and overall RS. It involves capturing individuals' perceptions of various aspects of their relationship, including emotional connection, communication, trust, intimacy, and fulfilment of needs. The assessment of RS is crucial, as it provides insights into the quality and well-being of the relationship. Researchers and practitioners use various instruments, such as questionnaires or scales, to assess RS, including the commonly used Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and RAS. Assessing RS helps identify areas of strength and areas that may require attention or improvement within the relationship context.

The RAS was developed by Hendrick in 1988 to assess RS (Hendrick, 1988). The RAS includes items such as: ‘How well does your partner meet your needs?’ (Hendrick, 1988). The items were adapted to measure the satisfaction associated with communication via texting. Respondents use a Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction) (Hendrick, 1988). Satisfaction within relationships is compared to the extent to which partners meet SMME, as influenced by the way that individuals are attached. The scale correlates with other scales, with an internal consistency of .80 with the DAS and has a single factor reliability of .86. The total correlations of the items of the RAS were found to range between .573 and .760 (Hendrick, 1988). The scale is a generic measure of relationship satisfaction it was not adapted for use with diverse groups, particularly for use within the South African context.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data obtained in this study was analysed using cluster and mediation analyses and the ordinal logistic regression model together with correlation analysis. The ordinal logistic regression model was used to examine SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students, with attachment styles as mediating factor. With this model, the first step is to collect data on SMME and RS among the first-year Psychology students, with attachment styles as mediating factor. The data can be collected using self-report questionnaires, interviews, or other appropriate methods. In this study, a regression analysis was used to determine the mediating role that attachment styles play between SMME and RS.

4.5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the university students and the distribution of mental health, adjustment problems, and coping strategies. Measures of central tendency and variability, such as means, standard deviations, and ranges, were computed for continuous variables, while frequencies and percentages were computed for categorical variables.

4.5.2 Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlation is a statistical measure used to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It ranges from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation. In addition, -1 inversely indicates a perfect negative correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficient is denoted by the symbol ‘r.’

To calculate the Pearson correlation coefficient, the following formula can be used:

$$r = \frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} \quad (1)$$

Where:

x_i and y_i are the individual values of the two variables being correlated,

$\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ are the means of the two variables, and

n is the total number of observations.

A positive value close to 1 indicates a strong positive correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase. A negative value close to -1 indicates a strong negative correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to decrease. A value close to 0 indicates a weak or no correlation, implying that there is little or no linear relationship between the two variables. It is important to note that the Pearson correlation coefficient measures only linear relationships and may not capture other types of relationships, such as non-linear or curvilinear relationships. Furthermore, it is important to note that although the mode can be used to ascertain a relationship between variables it cannot be used to deduce causality.

4.5.3 Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis is a technique used to group similar data points together based on their characteristics. It helps identify clusters or subgroups within a dataset. The most common method used in cluster analysis is hierarchical clustering, with Ward's method being a widely used algorithm.

The objective of this algorithm is to partition a dataset S consisting of n-tuples of real numbers into k clusters $C1, \dots, Ck$ in an efficient way. For each cluster, Cj, one element cj is chosen from that cluster termed a centroid.

The basic k-means clustering algorithm is defined as follows:

Step 1: Choose the number of clusters k.

Step 2: Make an initial selection of k centroids.

Step 3: Assign each data element to its nearest centroid (in this way k clusters are formed, one for each centroid, where each cluster consists of all the data elements assigned to that centroid).

Step 4: For each cluster, make a new selection of its centroid.

Step 5: Go back to step 3, repeating the process until the centroids do not change (or some other convergence criterion is met).

4.5.4 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis is used to examine the mediating effect of a variable in the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. It helps determine if the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is partially or fully mediated by the mediator variable. The mathematical equations used in mediation analysis depend on the specific model being employed. One commonly used mediation model is the Baron and Kenny method, which involves conducting separate regression analyses. The equations in this model are explained in the following diagram:

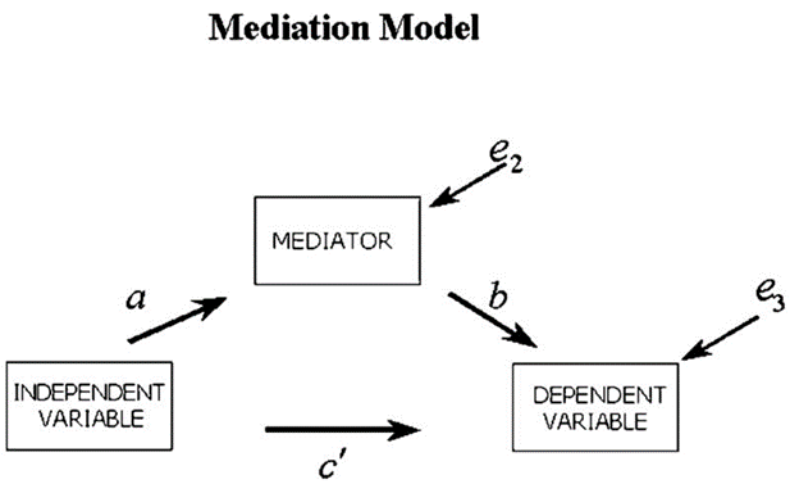

Figure 1: Flow chart depicting mediation analysis process on page 33 (Muller et al., 2005)

4.5.5 Ordinal Logistic Regression Model

Ordinal logistic regression is a statistical technique that is used to analyse the relationship between a set of independent variables and an ordinal dependent variable. In this study, ordinal logistic regression will be used to examine the relationship between the identified factors and mental health and adjustment issues among first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo. The ordinal logistic regression model can be expressed mathematically as follows:

$$logit(P(Y \leq j)) = \beta_{0_j} + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \ldots + \beta_k x_{\beta_1 x_k}$$

where $P(Y \leq j)$ is the cumulative probability of the dependent variable taking a value less than or equal to j, β_{0_j} is the intercept for the jth level of the dependent variable, $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_k$, are the independent variables, and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_k$ are the coefficients that measure the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

The ordinal logistic regression model can be estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. The goodness of fit of the model can be assessed using the likelihood ratio test, which compares the likelihood of the fitted model to the likelihood of a null model that assumes no relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2010; Johnson & Wichern, 2007; Hosmer & Leeshawn, 2000).

Overall, these methodologies provide different approaches for analysing data and exploring relationships between variables in this study on SMME, RS, and attachment styles among first-year Psychology students. However, it is important to note that the specific equations used may vary based on the research design, variables, and statistical methods chosen.

4.5.6 Ethical Considerations

4.5.6.1 Permission to Conduct the Study

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Limpopo Ethics Committee (TREC).

4.5.6.2 Informed Consent

All participants agreed to partake in the research and were made aware that they could cease participating in the research whenever they wanted to. The university students who agreed to participate were given an informed consent form to sign.

4.5.6.3 Voluntary Participation

All students who participated in the study did so out of their own free will.

4.5.6.4 Confidentiality

The participants were made aware of the extent to which their responses would be kept confidential, and all students who partook in the study adhered to a confidentiality agreement.

4.5.6.5 Avoiding Biasness

To avoid bias in the study, no preconceived ideas that could influence the outcome of the study were held and results were presented as they were.

4.5.6.6 Anonymity

Anonymity was maintained through strict controlled access to the test material and responses. All participants were requested to provide details that would not compromise their identity.

4.5.6.7 Free Expression of any Concerns

All student participants were informed of all the information that was necessary for them to know. They were allowed to express their thoughts and concerns freely.

4.5.6.8 Avoidance of Harm

The best interests of the students were upheld at all times. They were not coerced into doing anything that they chose not to do, or which may have posed them harm.

4.5.6.9 Respect and Dignity and Standard of Care

This research entailed a provision of care that supported the self-respect of all who participated in the study. It recognised their capacities and ambitions and did nothing to undermine this.

4.5.6.10 Beneficence and Maleficence

The participants of the study learned their attachment styles and the influence of these attachment styles on their daily interactions with their romantic partners. The participants willingly participated in the study, and they were not coerced into doing anything that would cause them harm.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter provided a description of the methodology used when conducting the study. This included the description of the design of the study, the sample of the study and how it was obtained, and the self-report questionnaires that were used to collect data. Furthermore, a statistical discussion of how the data was analysed was provided as well as the ethical principles considered when the study was conducted. The following chapter

entails the presentation of the findings of the study, including a description of the demographic characteristics of the participants and answering the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results and a discussion of the study. This discussion covers the demographics characteristics of the student participants and all the other objectives of the study. The implications of the results are also discussed in this chapter.

5.2 THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

The descriptive statistics of the study are outlined below. They offer valuable information about the sample characteristics, such as age distribution, study levels, relationship status, relationship duration, texting habits, social media platform preferences, and age groups. Understanding these variables can aid researchers in further analysing the relationship between SMME, RS, and the mediating role of attachment styles among first-year Psychology students (See Figures 1 – 5 below).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Age (Bio 2)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	statistic	statistic	statistic	statistic	statistic	statistic	Std. error	statistic	Std. error
Bio 2: Age	190	17	47	20.21	3.116	4.103	.176	29.072	.351
Valid N (listwise)	190								

Note. Table 1 above provides descriptive statistics on the age of the university students in the study. The data is based on a sample of 190 university students. The minimum age recorded is 17 years, while the maximum age is 47 years. The mean age of the university students is 20.21 years, with a standard deviation of 3.116. The skewness value of 4.103 suggests that the age distribution is positively skewed, indicating a longer right tail. The kurtosis value of 29.072 indicates a relatively high peak in the age distribution. The skewness value indicates that they are outliers who participated in the study who are above the average age of between 20 and 25.

The skewness resonates from a notion of, for example, good standard results emanating from normal data distribution. If data is calculated and obtains: 1) a negative value for skewness, this indicates that the tail is on the left side of the distribution, which extends towards more negative values; or 2) a positive value for skewness – this indicates that the tail is on the right side of the distribution, which extends towards positive values; of which a value of zero indicates that there is absolutely no skewness in the distribution,

which is interpreted that distribution is perfectly symmetrical. The presented explanation of skewness can be viewed in Figure 1 below.

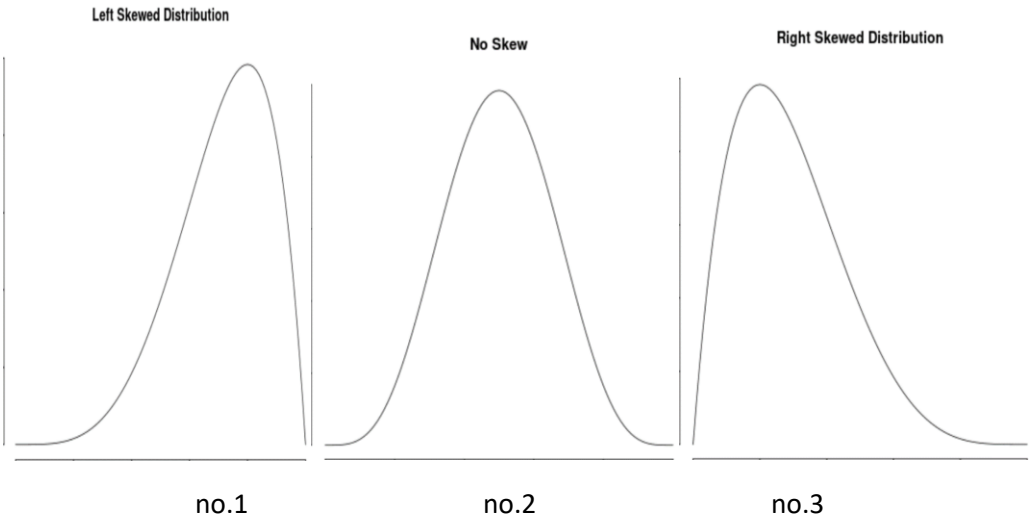

Figure 1: Different Skewness Curves to Explain the Distribution of the Data

Note. Kurtosis measures the tailedness of a distribution. Tailedness represents how frequent the outliers occur. Excess kurtosis is the tailedness of a distribution relative to a normal distribution.

Table 2

Bio 3 – Study Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	Year one	134	70.5	70.5	70.5
	Year two	26	13.7	13.7	84.2
	Year three	14	7.4	7.4	91.6
	Year four	11	5.8	5.8	97.4
	Year five	5	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

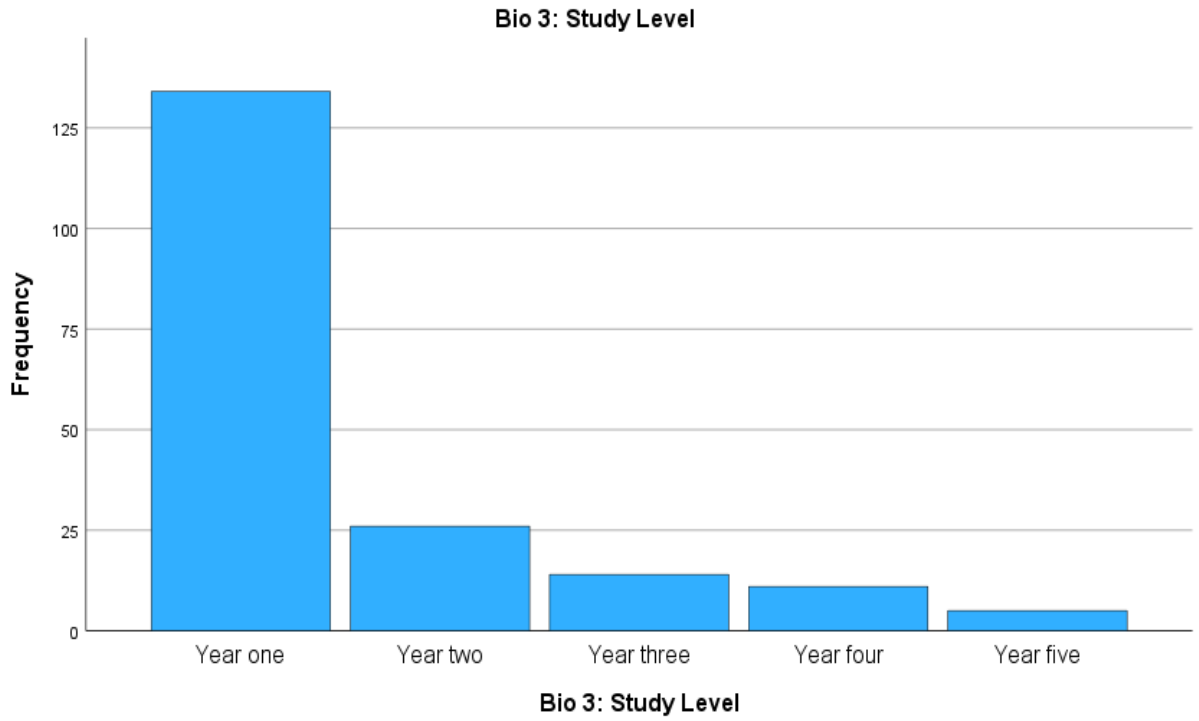

Figure 2: The study levels of students

Note. Table 2 and Figure 2 above present the distribution of university students across different study levels. Most university students (70.5 percent) are in their first year of study. The second year comprises 13.7 percent of university students, while the third, fourth and fifth years comprise 7.4 percent, 5.8 percent, and 2.6 percent of university students, respectively.

Table 3

Bio 4 – Are you within a romantic relationship? Yes or No

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	No	74	38.9	38.9	38.9
	Yes	116	61.1	61.1	61.1
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

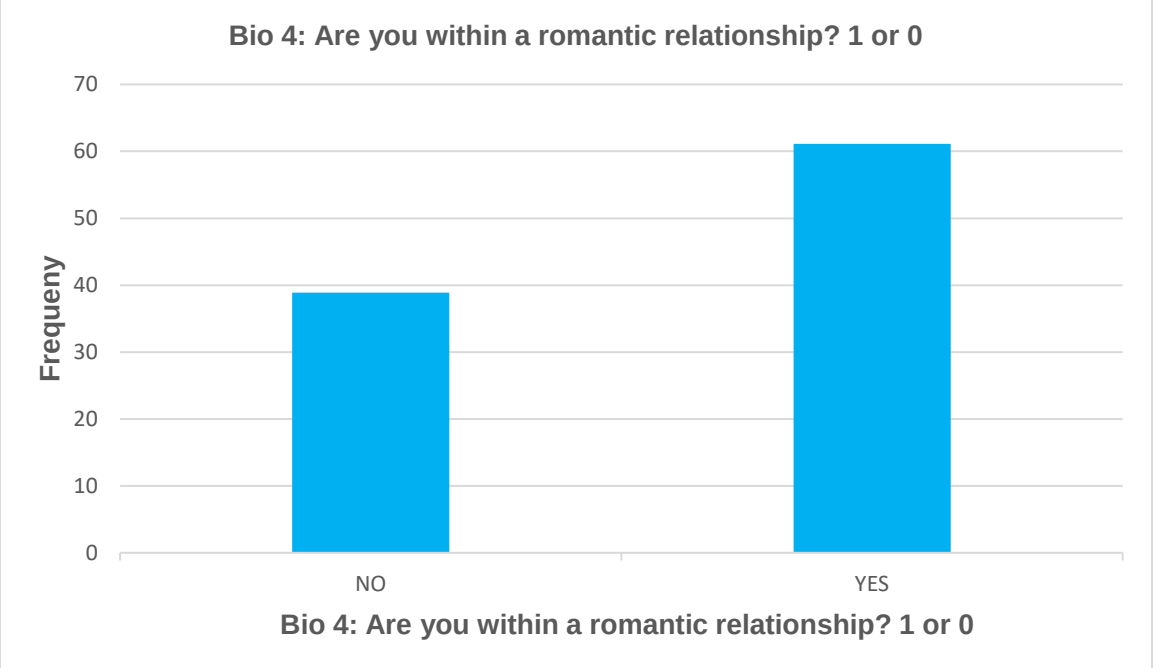

Figure 3: The result of a bar plot showing the distribution of romantic relationship status among the students (Yes = 1 or No = 0)

Note. Table 3 and figure 3 above show the distribution of students who are either in a romantic relationship or not. Out of 190 students, 61.1 percent stated that they are in a romantic relationship, while the remaining 38.9 percent are not.

Table 4

How long have you been in a relationship?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	Less than one year	63	33.2	33.2	33.2
	More than one year	39	20.5	20.5	53.7
	Not sure	88	46.3	46.3	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

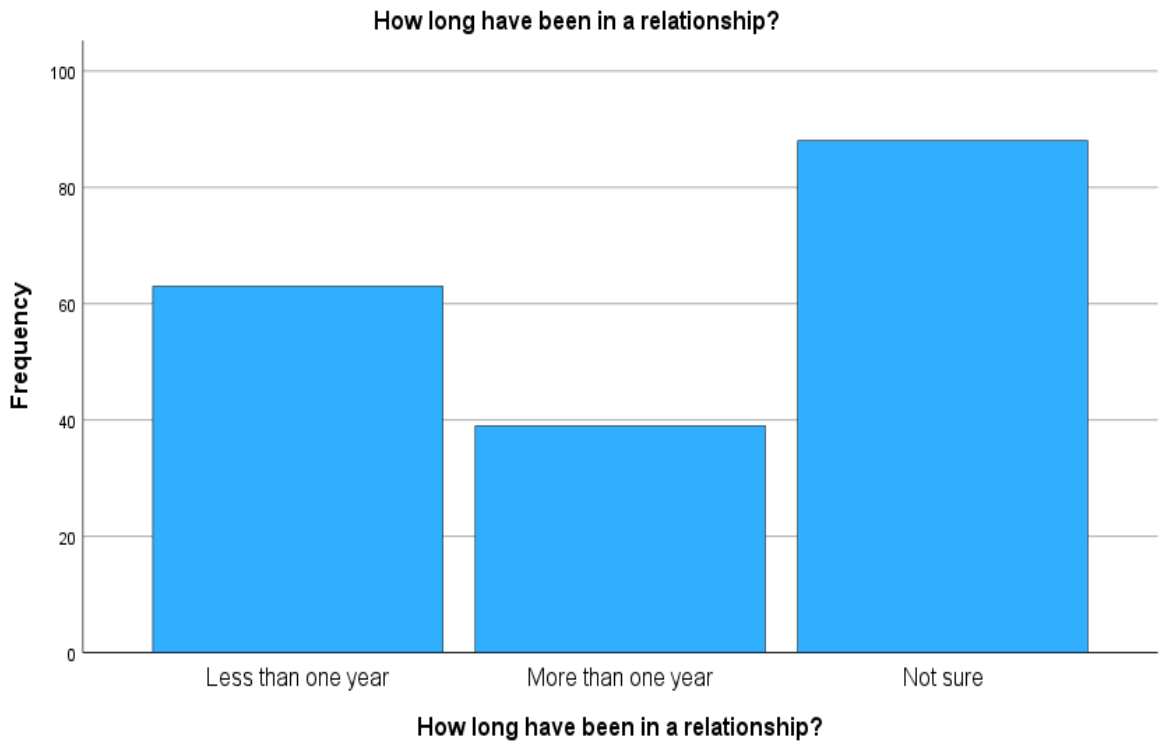
How long have been in a relationship?
Frequency
100
80
60
40
20
0
Less than one year
More than one year
Not sure
How long have been in a relationship?

Figure 4: A bar graph presenting the duration of first-year Psychology students' current relationships

Note. Table 4 and Figure 4 above provide information on the duration of first-year Psychology students' current relationships. A total of 33.2 percent of the students have been in a relationship for less than one year, while 20.5 percent have been in a relationship for more than one year. Additionally, 46.3 percent are not sure about the duration of their relationship.

Table 5

Bio 6 – Is texting using social media the mainstream method of communication in your relationship? Yes or No

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	No	50	26.3	26.3	26.3
	Yes	140	73.7	73.7	100.0
	Total	190	100.0	100.0	

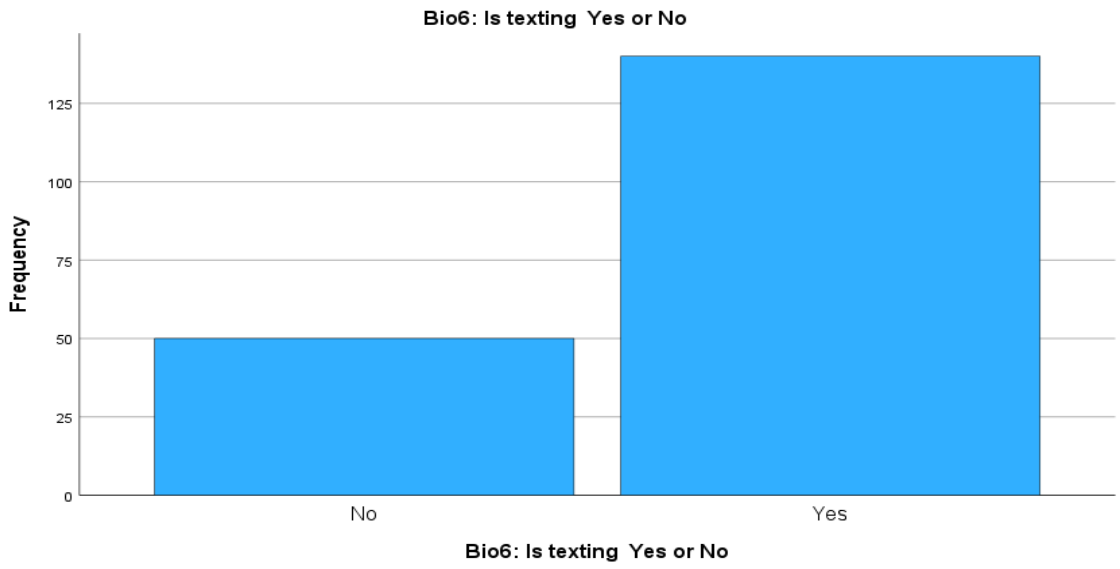

Figure 5: A bar plot showing the distribution of texting among first-year Psychology students in a relationship (Yes = 1 or No = 0)

Note. Table 5 and Figure 5 above focused on determining whether texting as a medium of communication is the most frequently used method of communication by first-year Psychology students. A total of 73.7 percent of participating students engage in texting, while 26.3 percent do not text. This indicates that the majority of first-year Psychology students rely on texting through social media as a medium of communication within the relationship.

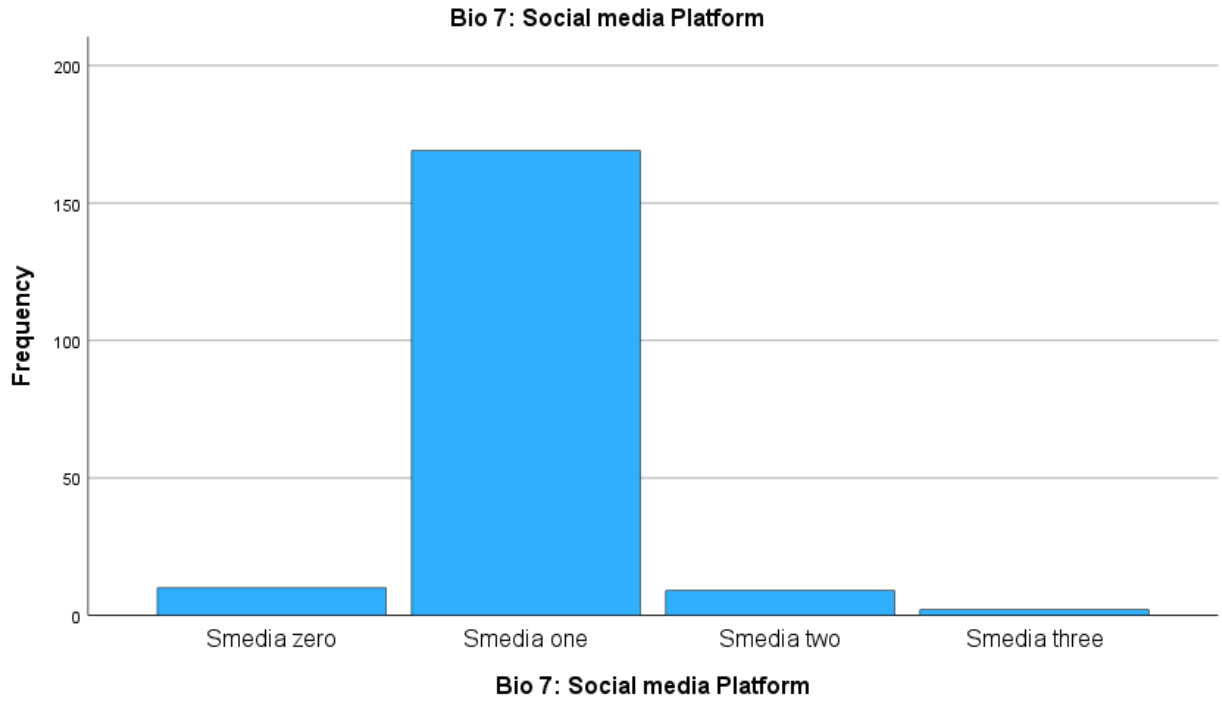

Figure 6: A bar plot showing the distribution of the use of social media platforms among first-year Psychology students in a relationship (Yes = 1 or No = 0)

Table 6

The use of social media platforms among first-year Psychology students in a relationship by age group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	Less than 19	52	27.4	27.4	27.4
	20 years to 25 years	130	68.4	68.4	95.8
	26 years to 30 years	7	3.7	3.7	99.5
	more than 26 years	1	.5	.5	100.0

Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Note. Table 6 and Figure 6 above provide insights into the distribution of first-year Psychology students across different age groups and their use of social media platforms to communicate. A total of 27.4 percent of participating students are less than 19 years old, while the majority, 68.4 percent, fall within the age range of 20 to 25 years. A small proportion, 3.7 percent, are between 26 and 30 years old, and only 0.5 percent are older than 26 years. This indicates that the majority of first-year Psychology students between the ages of 20 and 25 years use social media platforms as a method of communication in their relationships.

5.3 ATTACHMENT STYLES OF FIRST-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS WITHIN THEIR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Table 7 below represents the results of a cluster analysis conducted to identify attachment styles among first-year Psychology students within their romantic relationships.

Table 7

Iteration history[a] change in cluster centres for ECR-R1 – R36

Iteration	1	2
1	12.579	13.909
2	0.588	1.603
3	0.500	1.302
4	0.555	1.141
5	0.458	0.844
6	0.689	1.093
7	0.683	0.865
8	0.984	1.033
9	2.033	1.534
10	3.700	1.575
11	1.628	0.489
12	0.254	0.100
13	0.000	0.000

Note. Table 7 shows the iteration history of the cluster analysis to identify the attachment styles of the participating students within their romantic relationships. The 'Change in Cluster Centres for ECR-R1' indicates the changes in cluster centres across iterations. The numbers in the table represent the magnitude of change in the cluster centres for the two identified clusters (Cluster 1 and Cluster 2) in each iteration. The values gradually decrease over iterations, indicating that the cluster centres are stabilising. This indicates that students selected different responses in the ECR-R that deviated from the mean. The

responses of the students gradually moved towards the mean response from question 2 and this changed with question 10, where once again deviation was noticed. The responses again moved towards the mean until question 13, were little to no deviation was observed. The deviation in the responses shows the distinction in the way in which first-year Psychology students are attached.

Table 8: Final cluster centres for ECR-R1 – R36

	Clusters	
	1	**2**
ECR-R1	1	4
ECR-R2	2	3
ECR-R3	2	3
ECR-R4	1	5
ECR-R5	1	3
ECR-R6	2	4
ECR-R7	1	4
ECR-R8	1	6
ECR-R9	1	5
ECR-R10	1	3
ECR-R11	1	4
ECR-R12	2	2
ECR-R13	2	3
ECR-R14	2	2

ECR-R15	1	3
ECR-R16	1	5
ECR-R17	1	4
ECR-R18	1	5
ECR-R19	1	2
ECR-R20	1	5
ECR-R21	1	5
ECR-R22	1	5
ECR-R23	1	2
ECR-R24	1	5
ECR-R25	1	3
ECR-R26	1	5
ECR-R27	1	3
ECR-R28	1	2
ECR-R29	1	2
ECR-R30	1	4
ECR-R31	1	3
ECR-R32	1	4
ECR-R33	1	3
ECR-R34	1	6
ECR-R35	1	3
ECR-R36	2	5

Note. Table 8 above displays the final cluster centres for the variables assessed in the ECR-R1 to ECR-R36 items. Each row represents a specific item (question), and each column corresponds to one of the identified clusters (Cluster 1 or Cluster 2). The numbers in the table represent the average scores (mean) or responses on each item for each cluster. The cluster centres provide an indication of the characteristic patterns of responses associated with each cluster. The average scores in each of the items then show the responses that most students leaned towards (e.g., ECR-R8 has an average of 6 and ECR-R34 has an average of 6, followed by ECR-R4 with an average of 5, and so forth). In addition, the items with higher scores then assist to indicate the different attachment styles of first-year Psychology students. An average of 92 students were found to be anxiously attached and an average of 86 students were found to be avoidantly attached. Therefore, the results in Table 8 indicate that anxiety was found to be the attachment style that most students experience in their close relationships, as opposed to the avoidant style.

Table 9

Number of cases in each cluster for ECR-R1 – R36

Cluster	1	56.000
	2	134.000
Valid		190.000
Missing		0.000

Note. Table 9 above presents the number of cases in each cluster. Cluster 1 has 56 cases, while Cluster 2 has 134 cases. The 'Valid' row represents the total number of valid cases included in the analysis, which in this case is 190. The 'Missing' row indicates the number of cases with missing data, which is reported as 0 (indicating no missing data).

Based on the cluster analysis, two distinct clusters (Cluster 1 and Cluster 2) were identified among the first-year Psychology students in their romantic relationships. The final cluster centres in Table 9 provide insights into the attachment styles associated with each cluster. By examining the average scores on each item, the characteristic patterns of attachment-related beliefs, behaviours, or emotions exhibited by individuals in each cluster were identified.

For the full interpretation and understanding the attachment styles represented by each cluster, the specific items, and their meanings in the original questionnaire (e.g., ECR-R1 to ECR-R36) are referred to. The responses within each cluster were compared to the established attachment styles (e.g., secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, fearful-avoidant) to infer the attachment styles prevalent in this sample. Additionally, considering the sample sizes in each cluster (56 cases in Cluster 1 and 134 cases in Cluster 2), the relative prevalence of the identified attachment styles within the sample could be examined. The interpretation of attachment styles was done cautiously, considering the limitations and assumptions of the cluster analysis technique, as well as the specific characteristics and context of the study population.

5.4 TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED BY FIRST-YEAR Psychology STUDENTS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Objective 2 was aimed at determining the types of social media platforms used by the first-year Psychology students in romantic relationships and their role in RS.

Table 10

Social media platforms used

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Smedia zero (None)	10	5.3	5.3	5.3
Smedia one (WhatsApp)	169	88.9	88.9	94.2
Smedia two (Facebook)	9	4.7	4.7	98.9
Smedia three (Instagram)	2	1.1	1.1	100.0
Total	190	100.0	100.0	

Note. Table 10 above determines the types of social media platforms used by first-year Psychology students in romantic relationships and their role in RS. Out of 190 students, 169 (88.9 percent) use a social media platform labelled as ‘Smedia one’, i.e., WhatsApp, as a mode of communication in their relationships, nine (4.7 percent) use ‘Smedia two’, i.e., Facebook, and two (1.1 percent) use ‘Smedia three’, i.e., Instagram.

5.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG FIRST-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

The tables below present the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results for the variables related to SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students.

Table 11

Descriptive statistics for SMME variable and RS variable

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SMME Variable	2.2977	1.14406	190
RS Variable	2.7797	1.17891	190

Note. Table 11 above displays the descriptive statistics for the SMME variable and RS variable. The mean value for the SMME variable is 2.2977, indicating the average level of SMME among the participating students. The standard deviation of 1.14406 suggests some variability in responses, with scores ranging around the mean. For the RS variable, the mean is 2.7797, indicating the average level of RS. The standard deviation of 1.17891 suggests a moderate amount of variability in RS scores. Table 11 and 12 indicate a positive correlation between RS and SMME at 0.381.

Table 12

Correlations between SMME variable and RS variable

		SMME variable	RS variable
SMME variable	Pearson correlation	1	0.381** <0.001
RS Variable	Pearson correlation	0.381** <0.001	1

Note. Table 12 above shows the correlations between the SMME variable and RS variable. The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. In this case, the correlation between SMME and RS is 0.381. This indicates a moderate positive correlation between SMME and RS. The significance level of <0.01 suggests that the correlation is statistically significant. This means that the observed correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

5.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS, RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND ATTACHMENT STYLES

Tables 13 to 16 below present the results of an ordinal regression analysis investigating the relationship between SMME, RS, attachment styles (ECR), and other factors among the participating students. Further discussions and interpretation of the findings follow in the tables below.

Table 13

Model-fitting information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	1034.410			
Final	947.142	87.268	7	<0.001

Note. Table 13 above presents the model-fitting information, including the -2 Log Likelihood, Chi-Square value, degrees of freedom (df), and significance (Sig.). The Intercept Only model's -2 Log Likelihood is 1034.410, while the final model's -2 Log Likelihood is 947.142. The Chi-Square value of 87.268 indicates that the final model significantly improves the model fit compared to the Intercept Only model ($df = 7$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 14:

Goodness of fit

	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
Pearson	5392.850	4073	<0.001
Deviance	947.142	4073	1.000

Note. Table 14 above provides the goodness-of-fit measures for the final model. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 5392.850 with a large degree of freedom (df = 4073), indicating a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies (p <

0.001). The Deviance Chi-Square value is 947.142 (df = 4073, p = 1.000), indicating an adequate fit of the model. The Deviance Chi-Square value is a goodness-of-fit statistic that measures how well the observed data corresponds to the fitted model. A p-value of 1 indicates that the model fits the data well. The Deviance Chi-Square value is 947.142 with 4073 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 1.000, indicating that the model fits the data well and showing that the results that follow can be trusted.

Table 15:

Pseudo R-squared

Cox and Snell	0.368
Nagelkerke	0.370
McFadden	0.084

Note. Table 15 above presents the pseudo R-squared. This table presents different measures of pseudo-R-squared, including Cox and Snell, Nagelkerke, and McFadden. These measures estimate the proportion of variance explained by the model. In this case, the Cox and Snell R-squared is 0.368, Nagelkerke R-squared is 0.370, and McFadden R-squared is .084. These values indicate that the model explains about 37 percent of the variance in the dependent variable when using Nagelkerke's R-squared. That is, these values suggest a moderate to relatively good fit of the model.

The determination of the SMME of the first-year Psychology students within romantic relationships was tackled together with the determination of their RS using the ordinal

regression analysis. The parameter estimates of experiences in close relationships and SMME on RS were regressed and the confidence intervals were also calculated to respond to objectives 3 and 4.

Table 16

Ordinal regression parameter estimates on ECR-R and SMME on RS together with other factors

	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	Df	Sig.
[Rs = 1.00]	4.572	1.849	6.116	1	0.013
[Rs = 1.29]	4.629	1.849	6.265	1	0.012
[Rs = 1.57]	4.738	1.850	6.555	1	0.010
[Rs = 1.86]	4.790	1.851	6.696	1	0.010
[Rs = 2.00]	5.067	1.854	7.466	1	0.006
[Rs = 2.14]	5.188	1.856	7.815	1	0.005
[Rs = 2.29]	5.301	1.857	8.145	1	0.004
[Rs = 2.43]	5.439	1.859	8.559	1	0.003
[Rs = 2.57]	5.569	1.861	8.955	1	0.003
[Rs = 2.71]	5.692	1.862	9.339	1	0.002
[Rs = 2.86]	5.893	1.865	9.983	1	0.002
[Rs = 3.00]	6.087	1.868	10.622	1	0.001
[Rs = 3.14]	6.278	1.870	11.266	1	<0.001
[Rs = 3.29]	6.544	1.874	12.195	1	<0.001

	[Rs = 3.43]	7.019	1.881	13.927	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 3.57]	7.465	1.887	15.644	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 3.71]	8.034	1.897	17.947	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 3.86]	8.332	1.902	19.195	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.00]	8.588	1.907	20.285	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.14]	9.526	1.931	24.332	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.29]	9.774	1.940	25.391	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.43]	10.492	1.974	28.254	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.57]	11.195	2.031	30.370	1	<0.001
	[Rs = 4.71]	11.891	2.135	31.018	1	<0.001
Location	SMME	0.382	0.126	9.246	1	0.002
	ECR-R	0.929	0.132	49.541	1	<0.001
	Bio2Age	0.109	0.054	4.028	1	0.045
	[Bio3StudyLevel=1]	0.080	0.972	0.007	1	0.934
	[Bio3StudyLevel=2]	0.011	0.978	0.000	1	0.991
	[Bio3StudyLevel=3]	0.105	1.024	0.011	1	0.918
	[Bio3StudyLevel=4]	0.118	0.995	0.014	1	0.906
	[Bio3StudyLevel=5]	0	.	.	0	.

Note. Table 16 above provides the estimated coefficients (Estimate), standard errors (Std. Error), Wald statistics, degrees of freedom (df), and significance (Sig.) for the threshold values of the RS categories, as well as other factors such as SMME, ECR-R (attachment styles), and Bio2Age (age-related factor). The threshold values represent the cut-off points between different RAS categories. Each threshold has an

associated estimate, indicating its effect on the likelihood of belonging to a particular RAS category.

The results in Table 16 present an ordinal regression analysis, which aims to understand how numerous factors influence the likelihood of a dependent variable being categorised into different levels on the RAS. The threshold estimates indicate the specific values on the RAS at which the probability of transitioning from one category to the next higher category increases. For instance, a threshold estimates of 4.572 suggests that when the RAS value reaches around 4.572, the likelihood of moving from the lowest category to the next one rises until the iterations are stabilised at estimate 11.891 with significant p-value equals to < 0.001.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals the impacts of independent variables (RS) on this categorisation process. The ‘Location’ section provides estimates for SMME and ECR-R. An increase of one unit in SMME corresponds to a 0.382 increase in the log odds of moving to a higher category on the RAS, while a one-unit increase in ECR-R corresponds to a 0.929 increase in the log odds of the same transition.

The analysis also includes estimates for other independent variables, such as Bio2Age and Bio3StudyLevel. Each estimate signifies the change in the log odds of transitioning to a higher RAS category when the corresponding independent variable increases by one unit, with other variables held constant. The ‘Sig.’ column indicates the significance level of each estimate, showing whether the variables have a statistically significant

impact on the dependent variable. Generally, a significance level below 0.005 suggests significance.

In summary, this ordinal regression output offers insights into how numerous factors, including SMME, ECR-R, Bio2Age and Bio3StudyLevel influence the likelihood of being in higher categories on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The threshold estimates pinpoint transition points between categories, while the location estimates quantify the impact and influence of independent variables on these transitions.

Table 17

Ordinal regression parameter estimates with confidence intervals on ECR and SMME on RS together with other factors

	95% Confidence Interval	
	Lower bound	Upper bound
[Rs = 1.00]	.949	8.195
[Rs = 1.29]	1.004	8.253
[Rs = 1.57]	1.111	8.365
[Rs = 1.86]	1.162	8.418
[Rs = 2.00]	1.432	8.701
[Rs = 2.14]	1.551	8.826
[Rs = 2.29]	1.660	8.941
[Rs = 2.43]	1.795	9.083
[Rs = 2.57]	1.921	9.216

	[Rs = 2.71]	2.041	9.342
	[Rs = 2.86]	2.238	9.549
	[Rs = 3.00]	2.427	9.748
	[Rs = 3.14]	2.612	9.944
	[Rs = 3.29]	2.871	10.217
	[Rs = 3.43]	3.333	10.705
	[Rs = 3.57]	3.766	11.164
	[Rs = 3.71]	4.317	11.752
	[Rs = 3.86]	4.605	12.060
	[Rs = 4.00]	4.851	12.325
	[Rs = 4.14]	5.741	13.310
	[Rs = 4.29]	5.972	13.575
	[Rs = 4.43]	6.624	14.361
	[Rs = 4.57]	7.214	15.177
	[Rs = 4.71]	7.707	16.076
Location	SMME	0.136	0.628
	ECR	.670	1.188
	Bio2Age	.003	.215
	[Bio3StudyLevel=1]	-1.826	1.986
	[Bio3StudyLevel=2]	-1.906	1.927
	[Bio3StudyLevel=3]	-1.901	2.112
	[Bio3StudyLevel=4]	-1.832	2.067
	[Bio3StudyLevel=5]	.	.

Note. Table 17 above provides the confidence intervals for the estimated coefficients, indicating the range of plausible values for each estimate. The lower and upper bounds of the confidence intervals are presented for each factor.

Table 18:

Test of parallel lines[a]

Model	-2 Log likelihood	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	947.142			
General	946.609b	0.533c	161	1.000

Note. Table 18 above presents the test of parallel lines, which examines whether the assumption of parallel lines across response categories holds true. The -2 Log Likelihood of the General model is 946.609 (df = 161, p = 1.000), suggesting that the assumption of parallel lines is supported, indicating that the relationship between the predictors and the odds of belonging to each RAS category is consistent across all categories.

Overall, the output provides information on the model fit, goodness-of-fit measures, pseudo-R-squared values, parameter estimates, confidence intervals, and the test of parallel lines. These findings help in understanding the relationships between SMME, RS, ECR-R, and other factors among first-year Psychology students.

5.7 THE MEDIATING ROLE THAT DIFFERENT ATTACHMENT STYLES PLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

Note. Table 19 below outlines the regression model between SMME and RS with ECR-R as a mediating factor. The mediation analysis was conducted to determine the mediating role of different attachment styles (represented by the ECR-R variable) between SMME and RS.

Table 19

The regression model between SMME and RS with ECR-R as a mediator model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.075	.219	4.911	.000	.643	1.507
Rs	.267	.083	3.204	.002	.102	.431
ECR	.157	.079	1.984	.049	.001	.313

Note. Table 19 presents the regression models and associated coefficients for the variables in the analysis. The first model is the regression model between SMME and RS with ECR-R as the mediator. The second model represents the total effect model, which includes the direct and indirect effects of SMME on RS.

Moving to the coefficients, the constant represents the intercept of the regression equation. In this case, the constant is 1.075, indicating the estimated RS score when the predictor variables are zero. The coefficient for the RAS variable in the first model is

0.267, with a standard error (se) of 0.083. The coefficient (0.267) represents the positive association between RS, the mediator variable Attachment Styles (ECR-R), and SMME. The p-value of 0.002 is less than 0.05, which indicates that this coefficient is statistically significant. The positive coefficient suggests that higher levels of attachment styles (ECR-R), both anxious and avoidant, are significantly associated with increased RS when social media maintenance expectations are met.

The coefficient for the ECR variable in the first model is 0.157, with a standard error of 0.079. This coefficient represents the relationship between the mediator variable (ECR-R) and SMME, controlling for RS. The p-value of 0.049 suggests that this coefficient is marginally significant. The positive coefficient indicates that higher levels of attachment styles (ECR-R) are associated with increased SMME.

Moving to the second model, the total effect model, the R-squared is 0.145, suggesting that 14.5 percent of the variance in RS is explained by SMME alone. The total effect of SMME on RS is represented by the coefficient of 0.370, with a standard error of 0.065. This coefficient indicates the direct relationship between SMME and RS, without considering the mediating effect of attachment styles. The p-value of 0.000 suggests that this coefficient is highly significant, indicating a strong positive association between SMME and RS.

The standardised coefficients show the same pattern of relationships between the variables. The standardised coefficient for the RS variable in the total effect model is 0.381, indicating a moderate positive relationship between RS and SMME.

Finally, the analysis also provides information on the indirect effects of SMME on RS through the mediator variable (ECR-R). The indirect effect is represented by the coefficient for the ECR-R variable (0.103), along with its standard error (0.060) and 95 percent bootstrap confidence intervals (BootLLCI and BootULCI). The completely standardised indirect effect is also provided (0.106), which represents the effect size of the indirect pathway.

5.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 5 has responded to all six objectives of the study. The demographic information was included to understand the characteristics of the first-year Psychology students as the participants of the study. A majority of the students were found to be between the ages of 20 and 25 with a preference of texting through WhatsApp as their method of communication. Objectives three and four were paired together and solved by the application of ordinal regression estimates and their statistical significance. The chapter entailed interpretation of the results of the study. The results indicated that more students are anxiously attached in their relationships with high SMME and RS. Furthermore, SMME and RS were found to be positively correlated, with attachment styles partially mediating the relationship between the two variables.

The next chapter discusses the results obtained, the limitations of the study, and offers some recommendations for going forward.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to determine the attachment styles of first-year Psychology students and their mediating role on the relationship between SMME and RS with their partners. The objectives of the study were as follows: to determine the demographic characteristics of the first-year Psychology students, (b) to identify the attachment styles of the first-year Psychology students within their romantic relationships, (c) to determine the types of social media used by first-year Psychology students within romantic relationships, (d) to determine the SMME of first-year Psychology students within romantic relationships, (e) to determine the RS of first-year Psychology students, (f) to determine the relationship between SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students, and (g) to determine the mediating role that the different attachment styles play between SMME and RS. The results are interpreted in this chapter along with a discussion of how they correspond with literature and the theoretical frameworks. This is followed by the conclusion, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

6.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The demographic characteristics of university students who participated in the study differed according to age, study level, relationship status and social media preferences. The study was made up of 190 university students with an age range of 17 to 47 years, with the majority falling between 20 and 25 years old.

Of these students, 61 percent were in romantic relationships and the majority were not sure how long they had been in those relationships. The majority also noted that they use texting as a medium of communication within their relationships, with the greatest number having indicated that they prefer using WhatsApp as a social media platform to communicate in their relationships than other social media platforms. This could be associated with students having access to the university Wi-Fi connection, which makes it easy for them to text their partners via WhatsApp text messaging.

The findings of this study agree with those of Weisskirch (2012), who stated that the way individuals are emotionally attached influences the method they use to communicate and how often they communicate using that method. The WhatsApp platform increases proximity within the relationship and perceived intimacy, as it allows the students to make video calls, update each other on their daily activities and display affection.

The minimal use of both Facebook and Instagram can be attributed to the platforms being less personal and more costly to use in terms of data costs. Furthermore, these platforms can be said to result in students feeling less in control of their relationships and with more

external factors influencing the quality and privacy of their relationships, as the two platforms are more open to the public. In addition, as the two platforms are open to the public, this opens up the user to public judgement and critique, which the anxiously attached individuals are sensitive to. The aforementioned is supported by Boustead (2021) and Bukhari et al. (2023), who identified that anxiously attached individuals need constant reassurance, however, social media exposes them to bullying and negative comments instead. Rempel et al. (2001) found this to be the worst scenario for the anxiously attached, as it could lead to conflict and detachment in relationships. Out of 190 students, only 10 were found to communicate without using the previously identified social media platforms. This supports the finding that the majority of the first-year Psychology students use the primary social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with WhatsApp being the preferred method.

Previous studies by Morey et al. (2013) and Skierkowski and Wood (2012) identified that technology has become the common way in which romantic partners communicate with each other. In addition, more people are now using technology within their romantic relationships, as mobile phones have penetrated almost every aspect of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Ishii (2006) found that mobile phones have become an integral part of daily life, especially for young people. According to Hall and Baym (2012), young adults use mobile phones to make phone calls and to text. According to Luo and Tuney (2015), texting is the act of sending and receiving messages between mobile devices or any other device over different phone networks. Young adults are most likely to use texting in their close relationships (Luo, 2014).

6.3 ATTACHMENT STYLES THAT FIRST-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS HAVE WITHIN THEIR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The attachment styles of first-year Psychology students were assessed using the ECR-R questionnaire, which consists of items that assess two dimensions of attachment, namely: anxiously and avoidantly attached. With this questionnaire, individuals respond to statements related to their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours in romantic relationships, providing insights into their attachment orientations. The results of the study found the first-year Psychology students to be anxiously and avoidantly attached. In addition, the majority of the students were found to be anxiously attached within their romantic relationships. It can therefore be concluded that the majority of first-year Psychology students seek greater proximity with their partners and to be constantly assured in their romantic relationships (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012). While only a minority were found to be avoidantly attached, many students in the study seem to cling to relationships for external validation and a sense of belonging. This agrees with the findings of Drouin and Landgraff (2012), who maintained that anxiously attached individuals seek to be close to their partners and are constantly fearful of their partners leaving them, seek external approval and always want their needs for proximity to be met.

When young adults enter romantic relationships, they do so with attachment styles, or templates of attachment, that they formed with their primary attachment figures in their lives. The aforementioned is supported by Gilliath (2016), who asserted that how people relate to those whom they are attached to early on in life determines how they function in

their adult relationships. There are differences in the ways young adults are attached in romantic relationships, with some being anxiously attached and others being avoidantly attached. According to Weisskirch (2012), research in attachment has resulted in a consensus that attachment varies along the avoidance and anxiety dimension. Individuals who are avoidantly attached seek emotional distance in their relationships and depend on themselves, as they have a lack of trust for any other person but themselves (Morey et al., 2013). Anxiously attached individuals seek to be close to their partners and they are constantly fearful of their partners leaving them; moreover, they seek to be approved by others and always want their needs for proximity to be met (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012).

6.4 TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR ROLE IN RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

Young adults have integrated the use of technology into their relationships, with an ever-increasing number using it to communicate with their partners. Therefore, more young adults use texting through social media as a means to communicate. This is supported by Reed et al. (2015) and Pierce (2009), who stated that although intimacy in romantic relationships was previously determined by face-to-face communication, social media platforms are now important for the initiation, maintenance, and the negotiation of relationships. The majority of students use WhatsApp to communicate within their romantic relationships, as indicated before.

In this study, Facebook, the second most popular media platform, was used by only nine students in their relationships. The third most popular social media platform, Instagram,

was used by only two out of the 190 students as a means of communication. The aforementioned concurs with Weisskirch (2012), who stated that the way individuals are attached influences the method they use to communicate and how often they communicate using that method. The majority of first-year Psychology students in this study were found to be anxiously attached, which supports their preferred use of WhatsApp to have their need for closeness satisfied. This could be associated with students having easy access to the free university Wi-Fi connection. Moreover, WhatsApp increases their proximity within the relationship and perceived intimacy, as it allows them to make video calls, update each other on their daily activities and show affection, and to do so in private.

The results of the study also indicated that the first-year Psychology students have a high social media usage. Their SMME were assessed using the Social Media Maintenance Expectations scale, which was adapted from the work of Hall and Baym (2012), who asserted that the items of the scale assess interaction, inclusion, and mundane relational maintenance. The results indicate that the more the students' SMME are met, the higher the RS; furthermore, this finding applied to both the anxiously and avoidantly attached students. The anxiously attached are satisfied from having their partners share details of their daily activities with them, while the avoidantly attached are satisfied from having their partners respect their boundary of not sharing every detail of their day (Luo, 2014; Luo & Tuney, 2015).

These results are in line with literature, as Burgoon (1993) identified that when individuals engage in communication with other people, there are expectations that they hold. Furthermore, Hall and Baym (2012) stated that through SMME individuals expect to have full updates and to feel included in the daily life and activities of the person they are in a relationship with. The updates and inclusion can be said to increase the sense of proximity for the anxiously attached, which supports the finding of more first-year Psychology students being anxiously attached than avoidantly attached, as they have high SMME. On the other hand, the avoidantly attached manoeuvre for distance and their SMME therefore allow them to dissociate, e.g., requiring only minimal updates of their partner's activities throughout the day.

6.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS, ATTACHMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG FIRST-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

The study has identified that first-year Psychology students use different types of social media to communicate with their partners and they have high SMME, which in turn influence their RS, as indicated above. To assess RS the RAS was used. This involves capturing students' perceptions of various aspects of their relationship, including emotional connection, communication, trust, intimacy, and fulfilment of needs. In this study, the RS of participating first-year Psychology students was found to be high.

The study ascertained that SMME and attachment styles influence RS. This indicates that the more individuals have their social maintenance expectations met based on their attachment style, the higher their RS. The identified relationship between SMME, attachment styles and RS through data collected corresponds with the reviewed literature below.

According to Hall and Baym (2012), through SMME, individuals expect to have full updates and to feel included in the daily life and activities that the person they are communicating with engages in (Hall & Baym, 2012). The more individuals meet the SMME of their partners, the more their partners are satisfied with the relationship. This is supported by Ohadi et al. (2018) and Emmers-Sommer (2004), who found that similarity in texting behaviour between partners, such as frequency of texting, influences the satisfaction they derive from their relationships.

Furthermore, partners with a higher frequency of contact experience more satisfaction with their relationships. However, minimal contact can also be associated with RS if that is what is required in the relationship. It can therefore be inferred that SMME are high for both the anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals, as the anxiously attached have expectations that lead to an increase in proximity and the avoidantly attached have expectations that result in a decrease in proximity.

6.6 THE MEDIATING ROLE THAT THE DIFFERENT ATTACHMENT STYLES PLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA MAINTENANCE EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

The results indicated that the RS of the participants in the study was influenced by both attachment styles and SMME. In addition, the results further suggest that higher levels of attachment styles are associated with increased RS, after accounting for SMME. This is similar for the anxiously and avoidantly attached.

The results of the study suggest that attachment styles (anxious and avoidant, represented by the ECR variable) partially mediate the relationship between SMME and RS. The way in which individuals are attached contributes to the SMME that individuals hold and the extent to which they are satisfied with their relationships. However, the effect sizes of the indirect effects (mediation effects) are relatively insignificant compared to the direct effect of SMME on RS. This indicates that the impact of attachment styles on the relationship between SMME and RS is lower than the impact of SMME on RS.

Both the students with avoidant and the students with anxious attachment styles were found to have SMME. The anxious manoeuvre for proximity and the avoidant manoeuvre for distance. Overall, the results suggest that attachment styles mediate the relationship between SMME and RS for both the anxiously and the avoidantly attached. However, this does not equate to causality, that is, SMME do not result in RS. Instead, it means that the extent to which an individual's communication expectations are met influences their RS

considering their attachment styles. That is, if the need of the anxiously attached for proximity is met through communication, the more they are satisfied with their relationships. Furthermore, for the avoidantly attached, if their need for distance is met through communication, the more they are satisfied with their relationship.

Literature has found the following with respect to attachment and texting. Schade et al. (2013) found that when individuals text to express affection for their partners, this results in a higher partner attachment for men and women. According to the study done by Weisskirch (2012), anxiously attached individuals were found to be highly related to more frequent texting (Weisskirch, 2012). This is supported by Luo (2014), who found that texting allows anxious individuals to maintain constant contact with their partners. Furthermore, Boustead (2021) found that texting is beneficial for the anxiously attached individuals, as they typically have a negative self-image, need constant reassurance, and have an excessive need for closeness. Morey et al. (2013) found avoidant attachment to be less correlated with phone calls and texting. This was supported by a study conducted by Morey et al. (2013), who found that individuals with high avoidance scores communicate significantly less whilst using a phone.

Furthermore, Morey et al. (2013) and Riggs (2019) found that anxiously attached individuals derive greater satisfaction with their relationships when they texted more with their romantic partners. However, that was not the case for the avoidantly attached individuals, who were identified by Riggs et al. (2019) to withdraw from communication. The literature above supports that the anxiously attached have high SMME and a

resultant high RS when their SMME are met. The aforementioned literature differs with the findings of this study, in that the avoidantly attached were found to have low SMME and RS. However, the study identified the avoidantly attached to have high SMME that allow for dissociating, and when these expectations are met, they derive satisfaction from their relationships.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The study found that first-year Psychology students typically communicate using technology in the form of social media, with a preference for the WhatsApp platform. The way in which they interact using social media is influenced by their attachment styles that they formed with their primary attachment figures, with these attachment styles – i.e. anxiously or avoidant – influencing the SMME they have within their relationships. The extent to which their SMME are met subsequently influences their RS, and this applied to both the anxiously and avoidantly attached.

6.8 LIMITATIONS

The sample consisted of 190 students, enrolled for the psychology major under the faculty of humanities. This implies that the findings of this study are restricted to students enrolled in psychology. Most students at the University of Limpopo are young adults, and an inclusion of other majors and faculties could have given more inclusive results with greater depth. This study depended on the self-reporting approach of data collection, which could easily be biased or manipulated. Considering that the participants are

psychology students, they may have provided answers on the questionnaires that gave a different impression to their actual experiences.

6.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the mediation analysis and ordinal regression model on SMME and RS among first-year Psychology students, the following recommendations can be made:

Attachment-Aware Relationship Interventions: Given the significant mediating role of attachment styles between SMME and RS, it is crucial to design relationship interventions that promote attachment awareness. These interventions should focus on helping individuals to understand their own attachment styles and how they influence their relationship dynamics, including their expectations for social media maintenance. By providing education and guidance on attachment styles, individuals can develop a better understanding of their own needs and the needs of their partners, leading to healthier relationship dynamics and increased RS.

Education on Healthy Social Media Use: Since SMME significantly influence RS, it is essential to provide education and guidance on healthy social media use within relationships. This includes promoting open communication about social media expectations, setting boundaries, and fostering trust and respect in the online realm. By addressing unrealistic expectations and providing strategies for positive online

interactions, individuals can enhance their RS and reduce potential conflicts related to social media use.

Support for Relationship Building: Recognising the factors that influence RS, such as SMME, ECR, and Bio2Age, support programmes can be developed to help first-year Psychology students build and maintain healthy relationships. These programmes can provide resources and tools to enhance SMME, promote secure attachment styles, and address age-related factors that may impact RS. Providing workshops, counselling services, or peer support groups can help students navigate the challenges of relationships and develop skills for maintaining satisfying connections.

Continued Research and Evaluation: The findings of the study highlight the complexity of the relationship between SMME, RS and attachment styles. Further research should be conducted to explore these relationships in different populations and contexts. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into the long-term effects of social media use and attachment styles on RS. Additionally, evaluation studies should assess the effectiveness of interventions targeting SMME, attachment styles, and RS, to refine and improve intervention strategies.

Promote Relationship Quality Awareness: By disseminating the research findings and raising awareness about the impact of SMME and attachment styles on RS, educational institutions, counselling centres, and other relevant stakeholders can promote relationship quality awareness among first-year Psychology students. This could involve

workshops, seminars and/or educational campaigns aimed at fostering healthy relationships, including the mindful use of social media platforms.

6.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summary, the results suggest that SMME and attachment styles are important in influencing RS among first-year Psychology students. Understanding these relationships can inform interventions, programmes, or support systems tailored to enhancing relationship quality and well-being among students. Additionally, the findings highlight the significance of considering attachment styles as a mediating factor in understanding the impact of social media on RS.

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

Section A

This section is dedicated to obtaining your biographical details. Of significant importance is finding out whether you are within a romantic relationship.

Biographical details form

Preferred nickname:

Age:

Study level:

Are you within a romantic relationship? Yes or No

How long have you been within this relationship?

Is texting using social media the mainstream method of communication in your relationship? Yes or No

Which social media platform is the most preferred in your relationship?

If you answered yes to having a partner, provide the details of your partner's

preferred nickname:

age:

study level:

email:

Section B

This section is aimed at assessing how you are attached within your relationship.

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire

Today's date _____

Age _____ Gender _____

The statements beneath examine how you feel in your relationship with your romantic partner. Using the 1 to 7 Likert-type scale, after each statement elect a number to show how much you agree or disagree with the statement, with the number 4 being an even-handed response.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

fully disagree fully agree

1.	I am scared that I will lose this person's love	
2.	I choose not to show this person how I inherently feel about them	
3.	I often fear that this person will not want to be with me	
4.	I feel at ease sharing my private thoughts and feelings with this person	
5.	I often fear that this person does not actually love me	
6.	I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on this person	
7.	I fear that this person will not pay attention to me as much as I pay attention to them	
8.	I am at ease being close to this person	
9.	I often hope that this person's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for them	
10.	I do not feel at ease opening to this person	
11.	I worry a lot about my relationship	
12.	I choose not to be too close to this person	
13.	When this person is out of sight, I fear that they might become interested in someone else (and leave/exclude me)	
14.	I become uneasy when this person wants to be very close	
15.	When I show my feelings for this person, I fear they will not feel the same about me	

16.	I find it relatively easy to get close to this person	
17.	I rarely am fearful about this person leaving me (R)	
18.	It is not difficult for me to get close to this person (R)	
19.	This person makes me doubt myself	
20.	I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this person (R)	
21.	I do not often fear being abandoned (R)	
22.	It helps to turn to this person in times of need (R)	
23.	I find that this person does not desire to get as close as I would like	
24.	I tell this person just about everything (R)	
25.	Sometimes this person changes their feelings about me for no apparent reason	
26.	I talk things over with this person (R)	
27.	My need to be very close sometimes scares this person away	
28.	I am scared when this person gets too close to me	
29.	I fear that once this person gets to know me, they will not like who I really am	
30.	I feel at ease depending on this person (R)	
31.	It makes me angry that I do not get the affection and support I need from this person	
32.	I find it easy to depend on this person (R)	
33.	I fear that I will not measure up to other people	
34.	It is easy for me to be loving to this person (R)	
35.	This person only seems to notice me when I am angry	
36.	This person really understands me and my needs (R)	

Section C

Social Media Maintenance Expectations Scale

The statements below concern the mobile expectations you have of your partner. Use the 1 to 5 scale, and after each statement choose a number to show how much you agree or disagree with the statement, with the number 3 being a neutral response.

(Never = 1, Minimally = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, Always = 5)

I anticipate my partner to text me to talk about the things we are planning to do together.
I anticipate my partner to text me and check-in.
I anticipate my partner to text me and keep me updated.
I anticipate my partner to text me just to say hello.
I anticipate my partner to text me to pass time.
I anticipate my partner to text me and tell me where they are.
I anticipate my partner to text me and tell me where they are going.
I anticipate my partner texting me and telling me what they are doing next.
I anticipate my partner to text me and tell me what they are doing now.

Section D

This section is aimed at assessing satisfaction within relationships.

Choose from the answer sheet the letter for each item that perfectly answers that item for you.

How strongly does your partner accommodate your social media maintenance expectations?

1	2	3	4	5
Poorly	Less poorly	Moderate	Extremely	Extremely well

In general, how pleased are you with your relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Unsatisfied	Less satisfied	Moderate	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied

How good is your relationship in comparison to most?

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Bad	Moderate	Good	Excellent

How often do you wish you had not gotten into this relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Minimally	Moderate	Often	Extremely often

To what degree has your relationship met your initial expectations?

1	2	3	4	5
Hardly at all	Hardly	Moderate	Less completely	Completely

How much do you love your partner?

1	2	3	4	5
Very little	Little	Moderate	Plenty	Very plenty

How many problems associated with social media maintenance expectations exist within your relationship?

1	2	3	4	5
Very little	Little	Moderate	Plenty	Very plenty

Appendix 2: Documents for Compliance

Letter of Request for Permission

P O BOX 622
Makonde
0984
Date.....

The Registrar

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR INSTITUTION

Dear Sir/Madam

I hereby request permission to conduct research at your institution with first year Psychology students. I am registered for a master's degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of Limpopo. The research title is: **Social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction among first-year Psychology students at the University of Limpopo: Attachment styles as mediating factor.** This study aims to determine the relationship between social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction among first-year Psychology students and the mediating role that attachment styles play between the two variables.

Participation is voluntary. No person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way by choosing to participate or not participate in the study. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form for their participation in the study. Furthermore, information will be gathered from questionnaires that the participants will be requested to fill. Participants may refuse to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable with and may choose to withdraw from the study at any point should they feel unable to continue participating.

The results of the research will be presented in a mini dissertation that will be kept at the university. This information may be shared with others in the form of conference presentations and publication in journals. Should you need any further information, please contact me or my supervisor, using the contact details below.

Yours sincerely

…….

Grace Nethathe

0607782745

Dr MB Setwaba

Research – Psychology Supervisor

083673 4140/ 015 268 3505

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

I _____ hereby acknowledge my participation in a master's research project with a focus on the mediating role of adult styles of attachment between social media maintenance expectations and relationship satisfaction among students at Limpopo University. The goal of the study is to create awareness of the extent to which attachment styles influence the social media maintenance expectations that individuals hold and their satisfaction with their relationships.

Data in this study will be obtained using questionnaires. Firstly, a biographical questionnaire will be used to select the sample. Secondly, the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised will be used for the assessment of styles of attachment. Individuals will then be expected to provide a list of the social media maintenance expectations that they hold and rate the extent to which they are met. Lastly, the Relationship Assessment Scale will be used to assess relationship satisfaction.

The reason of the study has been fully relayed to me. I additionally comprehend that I am partaking openly and without being forced in any way to do so. I also comprehend that I can stop my participation in this study should I not want to participate further, and that this choice will not in any way affect me negatively.

I comprehend that this is a research project, whose purpose is not necessarily for my gain. I understand that my details as they appear in this consent form will not be revealed and that my answers will be private.

_____

Signature

_____

Date