

Predicting Facebook jealousy in romantic relationships: Further support for attachment style

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Abstract

Previous research has explored the role of individual differences in romantic jealousy. Research suggests that attachment styles predict romantic jealousy, with anxiously attached individuals experiencing high levels of romantic jealousy, whereas avoidant individuals experience less romantic jealousy. The aim of this study was to apply this previous literature to online Facebook jealousy. In a sample of participants in heterosexual romantic relationships ($n=124$), we found that attachment anxiety was a positive predictor of Facebook jealousy. Furthermore, we find that trust and attachment avoidance negatively predicted Facebook jealousy, in that low trust and low attachment avoidance were associated with higher Facebook jealousy, thus successfully applying previous findings focusing on offline jealousy to online jealousy. The findings of this study extend previous literature by providing further support of the role of attachment styles and trust in Facebook jealousy.

Keywords; Facebook jealousy, attachment style, trust, relationship quality

Social networking sites can be used for information seeking, which includes retrieving a romantic partners profile and digitally fact checking information relating to their past and current interactions. Increased exposure to this information has the potential to lead to romantic jealousy. Partners may inspect their current romantic partners past posts, tagged photos, or any interactions to identify cues of infidelity. '*Facebook intrusion*' refers to the use of Facebook to monitor a partner's social interactions (Chaulk & Jones, 2011). Romantic jealousy is often conceptualised as an emotion when reacting to a perceived active threat to a relationship (Bevan, 2013). Prolonged use of Facebook or social networking sites in general can increase the likelihood of monitoring of a romantic partners online profile (Darvell et al., 2011). In turn, this can have negative implications for romantic relationships. The aim of this study was to 1) conceptually replicate study 1 of Marshall et al. (2013) by exploring the role of attachment style and 2) to extend this literature by exploring the role of relationship components in relation to Facebook Jealousy.

Those with anxious attachment styles have been found to engage in electronic intrusion towards their partners as a cost-inflicting mate retention tactic (Bhogal & Howman, 2019; Bhogal et al., 2019). In relation to Facebook jealousy, those who are anxiously attached experience higher Facebook jealousy, whereas avoidantly attached individuals experience lower levels of Facebook jealousy (Marshall et al., 2013). In addition, anxiously attached people have lower trust in their partners and are less satisfied with the relationship, signifying why Facebook jealousy can arise when a partner has less trust in their partner (Muisse et al., 2009).

Trust has been found to moderate the relationship between attachment anxiety and Facebook jealousy (Marshall et al. 2013). As a result, we explored whether trust directly predicts Facebook jealousy in romantic couples. Furthermore, when examining romantic jealousy, previous research has found that passion, commitment and intimacy can predict

general jealousy in relationships (Overbeek et al., 2007). As a result, we added components of relationship quality as potential predictors of online jealousy. Although we aimed to conceptually replicate previous work, we also extended previous work by examining the role of passion and relationship commitment in Facebook jealousy.

H1: Attachment anxiety will positively predict Facebook jealousy

H2: Attachment avoidance will be negatively related to Facebook jealousy

H3: Trust will negatively predict Facebook jealousy

H4 (exploratory hypothesis): Commitment will be related to Facebook jealousy

H5 (exploratory hypothesis): Passion will be related to Facebook jealousy

Method

Participants and design

One hundred twenty-four heterosexual participants took part, who were currently in romantic relationships and both current Facebook users (112 women, $M_{age}=26.65$ years, $SD=9.43$), including students and members of the general population in the UK, recruited online via Qualtrics. Participants were asked to report how long they have been in their current romantic relationship ($M_{relationship\ length}=58.93$ months, $SD=69.52$). A cross-sectional correlational design was adopted whereby the predictor variables were relationship quality and attachment styles. The outcome variable was Facebook jealousy.

Materials

The following scales were used in this study:

Attachment styles

The *Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire* (Fraley et al., 2000) was used, and Cronbach Alpha values show that the scale was reliable in our sample (attachment anxiety, $\alpha=.92$, attachment avoidance, $\alpha=.93$).

Relationship quality

Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC) (Fletcher et al., 2000) is a six-component relationship quality measure of relationship quality, including the following subscales: satisfaction, commitment, love, trust, passion and intimacy. However, due to multicollinearity in the model, relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and love were removed from the analysis. Each subscale was reliable (satisfaction, $\alpha = .98$, commitment, $\alpha = .96$, intimacy, $\alpha = .88$, trust, $\alpha = .90$, passion, $\alpha = .89$, and love, $\alpha = .96$).

Facebook jealousy

The 27-item *Facebook Jealousy Scale* (Muisse et al., 2009) was used to measure Facebook jealousy. The scale was reliable in our sample ($\alpha = .97$).

Results

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to predict Facebook jealousy ($M=79.48$, $SD=37.54$) from commitment ($M=19.26$, $SD=3.54$), trust ($M=17.26$, $SD=4.26$), passion ($M=15.15$, $SD=4.61$), attachment anxiety ($M=49.54$, $SD=22.19$), and attachment avoidance ($M=49.78$, $SD=20.80$). Correlational coefficients are presented in Table 1 and statistics deriving from the analysis are presented in Table 2¹

(insert table 1 and 2 here)

The model explained 40.7% of the variance in Facebook jealousy, $F(5,118) = 16.23$ (adjusted $R^2 = .38$), $p < .001$, Durbin-Watson = 1.92, Cohens $f^2 = 0.686$. Trust and attachment avoidance negatively predicted Facebook jealousy, whereas attachment anxiety positively predicted Facebook jealousy.

¹ Due to restricted word limits for a brief report, we have reported exact p values for all correlations rather than discussing them in length.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore whether attachment styles and components of relationship quality predict Facebook jealousy. The findings suggest that those who reported higher attachment anxiety experienced Facebook jealousy, thus supporting hypothesis 1. Those reporting low attachment avoidance reported greater levels of Facebook jealousy, thus supporting hypothesis 2. Furthermore, hypothesis 3 was supported, as low levels of trust predicted Facebook jealousy. There was no support for hypotheses 3 and 4, which were exploratory. All findings are consistent with previous research, thus successfully replicating the findings of Marshall et al. (2013, see Martínez-León et al. 2017 for a recent review on romantic jealousy).

Attachment anxiety was a significant predictor of Facebook jealousy, in that anxious attachment reported high levels of Facebook jealousy. Consistent with previous research, those with anxious attachment styles often fear abandonment (Guerrero, 1998) and are therefore likely to regularly monitor their partner online which can lead to chronic jealousy. This finding is also consistent with the attachment theory, in that anxiously attached individuals are likely to monitor their relationship in response to a potential relationship threat (Collins, 1996). Similarly, this finding is consistent with the literature on electronic intrusion, whereby those with anxious attachment styles tend to engage in online partner monitoring due to potential risk to a relationship (Bhagal & Howman, 2019). To relieve anxiety, an individual may engage in electronic intrusive behaviours on social media sites (Reed et al., 2015), suggesting, that Facebook jealousy may be experienced by individuals with anxious attachment style as a method to retain a romantic relationship. Marshall et al. (2013) found a positive relationship between anxious attachment and Facebook jealousy, consistent with the findings reported here.

Attachment avoidance was a significant predictor of Facebook jealousy. This finding is consistent with the previous research that proposes that individuals who are avoidantly attached are negatively associated with Facebook jealousy (Marshall et al., 2013). Furthermore, the fact that lower levels of trust were associated with Facebook jealousy is consistent with previous research showing that trust mediates the relationship between attachment anxiety and Facebook jealousy (Marshall et al., 2013). In summary, we successfully replicated previous work on the role of attachment styles and trust in Facebook jealousy.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest. This research involved collecting data from human participants. Informed consent was taken from all participants who took part in this study. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Table 1. Bivariate Pearson's correlations between key variables.

| | | Facebook jealousy | Commitment | Trust | Passion | Attachment anxiety |
|----------------------|----------|----------------------|------------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| Commitment | <i>r</i> | -0.19 | — | | | |
| | <i>p</i> | .035 | — | | | |
| Trust | <i>r</i> | -0.36 | 0.57 | — | | |
| | <i>p</i> | < .001 | < .001 | — | | |
| Passion | <i>r</i> | -0.07 | 0.49 | 0.50 | — | |
| | <i>p</i> | 0.414 | < .001 | < .001 | — | |
| Attachment anxiety | <i>r</i> | 0.60 | -0.30 | -0.45 | -0.22 | — |
| | <i>p</i> | < .001 | 0.01 | < .001 | 0.016 | — |
| Attachment avoidance | <i>r</i> | 0.15 | -0.31 | -0.51 | -0.34 | 0.42 |
| | <i>p</i> | 0.102 | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |

Table 2. Results of the multiple regression model predicting Facebook jealousy

| Variable | β | <i>p</i> | <i>t</i> | CI (95%) | | Tolerance | VIF |
|-------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | |
| Commitment | -.04 | .664 | -.44 | -2.32 | 1.48 | .614 | 1.630 |
| Trust | -.23 | .025 | 2.27 | -3.85 | -.26 | .475 | 2.106 |
| Passion | .12 | .151 | 1.44 | -.38 | 2.39 | .682 | 1.467 |
| Attachment anxiety | .59 | <.001 | 7.18 | .72 | 1.28 | .742 | 1.348 |
| Attachment avoidance | -.19 | .027 | -2.25 | -.66 | -.04 | .682 | 1.466 |