



## Technology Use, Attachment Styles, and Gender Roles in the Dissolution of Romantic Relationships in Turkey

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### Abstract

Modern communication technologies (such as e-mailing, texting and messaging via social networks) have become increasingly used today while establishing, maintaining and dissolving romantic relationships. This issue, which is being long studied in the United States, has been recently addressed in developing countries as well. This research has two aims: a) to ascertain the prevalence of the use of technological communication channels such as messaging, e-mail and social networks in the relationship dissolution; b) to examine anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and gender roles in the process of the relationship dissolution through which technology was used. A total of 215 (167 female, 48 male) Turkish university students completed an online questionnaire about technology-mediated breakups, attachment style, and gender role attitudes. According to the correlation and regression analyses, 40% of the students (87 students) stated that they experienced a relationship dissolution via internet. Based on the findings, it may be concluded that there is a significant link only between the use of internet technology with avoidant attachment style and the acceptance of technology use to dissolve the relationship.

**Keywords:** Technology Use, Attachment Styles, Gender Roles, Relationship Dissolution, Technology

### Romantik İlişkilerin Sona Ermesinde Teknoloji Kullanımı, Bağlanma Biçimleri ve Cinsiyet Rollerini

#### Öz

Yeni iletişim teknolojileri (elektronik posta, sosyal ağ aracılığıyla mesajlaşma ve mesajlaşma gibi) günümüzde romantik ilişkileri kurarken, sürdürürken ve sona erdirirken sıklıkla kullanılır bir hale gelmiştir. Amerika'da uzun süredir araştırılmakta olan bu konu gelişmekte olan ülkelerde yeni ele alınmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın iki amacı bulunmaktadır: a) ilişki sonlandırma mesajlaşma, e- posta ve sosyal ağlar gibi teknolojik iletişim kanallarının kullanım yaygınlığını araştırmak; b) teknoloji kullanılarak yaşanan ilişki sonlandırma sürecinde kaygılı bağlanma, kaçınmalı bağlanma ve cinsiyet rollerini incelemektir. Araştırma 167 kadın, 48 erkek olmak üzere toplam 215 Türk üniversite öğrencisi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar çevrimiçi olarak internet üzerinden ayrılık, bağlanma biçimlerini, cinsiyet rollerini ölçen ölçekleri doldurmuşlardır. Yapılan korelasyon ve regresyon analizleri sonucunda öğrencilerin %40'ı (87 öğrenci) internet üzerinden bir ayrılık süreci yaşadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Sadece kaçınan bağlanma biçimi ile internet teknolojisi kullanımı ve ilişki sonlandırma teknoloji kullanımının kabulü faktörleri arasında anlamlı düzeyde ilişki bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Teknoloji Kullanımı, Bağlanma Biçimi, Cinsiyet Rollerini, Romantik ilişkinin bitmesi, Teknoloji.

## Introduction

The new communication technologies has become a vital part of our lives. More people use e-mail, chat/instant messaging (IM), text messaging, social networking sties to navigate, maintain, and even dissolve romantic relationships (Armstrong, Phillips, & Saling, 2000). While a lot of the research in this area has focused on American consumers of technology, we know less about how technology is used in Turkey to navigate romantic relationships. As in all developing countries, in Turkey, mobile phones and internet communications has gained popularity over the years. In Turkey, individuals using the internet in everyday or almost everyday has gained by %87,9. Mobile phones and internet communications has gained popularity over the years. Participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions is reported to be the most popular online activity accounting for 83.7 % of total time spent online during the three month, followed by seeking health-related information (69.6 %) and e-mail (46.3 %). Recently, cell phone ownership rates reached 97.8 % in general. In addition, the demographics of the technology use suggest that the age group with the highest volume of technology consumption is those between the ages of 16 and 24. Across all age groups, men (91.5 %) were found to use technology more than women (82.9 %) (TÜİK, 2017).

Recent research in this area has focused on understanding the predictor factors associated with use of technology in romantic relationships. For instance, low self-esteem has been found to be linked with higher use of social network sites (Ellison et al., 2007), whereas loneliness and depression are associated with problematic internet use (Caplan, 2003). Another important factor that might explain communication technology use is attachment style (Daly, 2002).

According to Bowlby (1973) individual differences in attachment behavior styles develop as the result of early interactions with an individual's caregiver. Bowlby (1982) proposed attachment theory to explain the emotional bonds that an individual forms to specific and non-replaceable persons (e.g., parents, romantic partners) across the life span. Attachment theorists and researchers have developed several models for conceptualizing and measuring attachment patterns in individuals. Frequently used model is the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) four-category model. These categories are secure attachment, dismissing attachment, preoccupied attachment and Fearful attachment. Secure attachment style is discribes that, the person has a positive view of the self and the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) When securely attached, the person feels worthy of love and expects the partner to be accepting and responsive (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). With a dismissing attachment style, the person has a positive view of the self and a negative view of the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). That is, when dismissingly attached, the person feels



worthy of love but views others as inconsistently and insufficiently able to fulfill safe haven and secure base functions when needed. Preoccupied attachment style is the person has a negative view of the self and a positive view of the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). That is, when preoccupiedly attached, the person feels unworthy of love (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The third attachment system Fearful attachment. With a fearful attachment style, the person has a negative view of the self and of the partner (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). That is, when fearfully attached, the person feels unworthy of love.

Given that technology is a relatively new medium of communication, our existing knowledge of interpersonal communication and attachment might be applicable in this area of research. For example, Jin and Peña (2010) explored the association between mobile phone use and attachment styles and found that participants who felt uncomfortable with closeness—those with high scores in avoidance—tended to use voice calls less than those with lower avoidance scores. In addition, Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) found that those high in anxiety were more likely to feel pressured to engage in “sexting” with their romantic partners. Attachment anxiety was associated with more positive attitudes towards sexting and sending texts that solicit sexual activity for those individuals in relationships. In addition, Weisskirch and Delevi (2012) reported that attachment anxiety was associated with participants’ use of technology in their relationship breakups. Overall, these studies clearly demonstrate the link between attachment styles and use of new communication technology in relationships.

According to a well-known Turkish University (i.e. Hacettepe) research, Turkish adolescents use mobile phones mostly for talking, sending and receiving SMS, listening to music, taking photos and playing games. It was found that females use mobile phones for sending receiving SMS, access Internet and play games more than males (Uçanok, Burnukara, & Sertkaya, 2009). In addition, Turkish high school students were found to prefer Internet for communication and socializing, and it was clear that as age increases, social networking and instant messaging becomes more important for them than other online activities (Uçanok et al., 2009).

Although communication technology is very common in Turkey, very little is known about the prevalence and predictors of using communication technologies in romantic relationships, especially among young adults. A few study conducted to explore the role of communication technology in romantic relationships. For example, Kirmizi, Bugay, and Delevi (2011) investigated the prevalence of communication technology use in relationship initiating and dissolution among high school students. The results showed that approximately half of the students used technology use in relationship initiating and dissolution. Furthermore, the participants sent



on average 97.58 SMSs (SD = 34.20), 19.17 (SD = 30.58) facebook/myspace messages, and 10.91 (SD = 14.96) emails to their romantic partners.

### Data Collection

Participants consisted of 215 (167 female, 48 male) Turkish university students. Their mean age was 21.88 years (SD = 1.61). 49.3 % of the individuals indicated that they were in a romantic relationship. Participants were recruited through convenient sampling based on accessibility and the cooperation of the university campuses in Ankara, Turkey. Before administering the instruments, necessary permissions were obtained from the University Human Subject Committee. All of the participants volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were guaranteed anonymity of their responses and confidentiality of the data. The completion of the survey took approximately 30 minutes.

### Measures

In order to measure participants' experience of being broken up with via technology, use of technology to break up and acceptability of using technology to break up these questionnaires were used which are described below. The questionnaires were developed by Weisskirch and Delevi (2012) and were translated into Turkish for the current study.

*Experience of Being Broken up with via Technology:* Participants indicated if anyone had ever broken up with them by chat/IM, email, posting on Social Networking Sites (SNS), text message, voice mail, or none. Participants were also prompted to explain, in narrative form, what happened if they had been broken up with via technology. Some examples of items are "Has anyone ever broken up with you via voice mail?" and "Has anyone ever broken up with you via text message." Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was reliable. *Use of Technology to Break Up.* Participants indicated if they used chat/IM, email, posting on SNS, text message, voice mail, or none to break up with a romantic partner. Some examples of items are "Have you ever used to break up with someone via voice mail?" and "Have you ever used to break up with someone via text message." The scale is reliable.

*Acceptability of Using Technology to Break Up.* Participants rated how acceptable they thought it was to break up with a romantic partner via chat/IM, email, posting on Facebook/MySpace, text message, and voicemail, using a scale of 1 = Not at all to 5 = Definitely. Some examples of items are "How acceptable do you think it is for someone to break up with their romantic partner via?" and "How acceptable do you think it is for someone to break up with their romantic partner via text message." Cronbach's alpha was .79.

*Adult Attachment.* Participants rated the 36 items from Fraley, Waller, and Brennan's (2000) Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised measure, using



a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. The measure produces dimensional subscale scores on attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The first 18 items assess the attachment-related anxiety and items 19 to 36 assess the attachment-related avoidance. Higher scores on each of the sunscales indicated greater attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Thus, a higher anxious attachment score indicates that the individual reports a higher degree of fearing interpersonal rejection. A higher avoidant attachment score suggests that the person is avoidant in his or her behaviors and is uncomfortable with interpersonal closeness. Some examples of items are "I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love" and "I am nervous when partners get too close to me." The statements above assess how participants feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how participants generally experience romantic relationships, regardless of their current relationship status. The psychometric properties of the Turkish version of the survey were examined by Selcuk, Gunaydin, Sumer, and Uysal (2005) with 256 Turkish undergraduate students. They reported acceptable internal consistency coefficients and convergent validity for the Turkish version of the scale. Cronbach's alpha for attachment anxiety was .92 and for avoidance was .93.

*Gender roles.* We measured gender roles using Spence and Hahn's (1997) 15-item Attitudes Towards Women Scale (AWS). Participants rated each item using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Agree Strongly to 4 = Disagree Strongly. The 15-item short version of the scale had satisfactory test-retest reliability (Daugherty & Dambrot, 1986). More recently, Whatley (2008) examined the factor structure of the 15-item short version of AWS and confirmed the unidimensionality of the scale. A few sample items are as follows: "swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man.", "under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing laundry" and "women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers". To get a total score in the AWS, all items are totalled after having items 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, and 14 reversely scored. The psychometric properties of the Turkish version of the survey were examined by Delevi and Bugay (2013) with two independent Turkish undergraduate students. The results of validity and reliability analyses indicated that the scale can be used to measure the roles and freedoms of women among Turkish samples. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .78.

## Data Analysis and Results

There are two hypotheses in this research



H.1. Are there gender and relationship status differences in attachment style differences?

H.2. Are attachment style and gender role attitudes predicted whether or not someone had broken up via technology?

## 1. Descriptive Statistics

### 1.1. Use of technology in navigating romantic relationships according to gender

**Table 1.**  
*Use of technology in navigating romantic relationships according to gender*

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Self- phone	84%	93 %
Chat/IM account	56 %	63 %
Email address	73 %	51%
SNSaccount (facebook/myspace et.)	51%	56 %
Voice message	4%	20 %

As seen Table 1 descriptive statistics indicated that 84% of the female and 93 % of the male participants have a self-phone, 56 % of the female and 63 % of the male participants have a Chat/IM account, 63% of the female and 73 % of the male participants have an email address, 51% of the female and 56 % of the male participants have a SNS account (facebook/myspace et.), and 4% of the female and 20 % of the male participants used voice message. Overall, it is clear that males use technology more than females in navigating romantic relationships.

### 1.2. Having Been the Recipient of Relationship Dissolution via Technology and Use to Break up

For this sample, 40% (n = 87) of the participants indicated that they had been broken up with via technology. Chat/IM was the most frequent method of delivery of the breakup 15% (n=33), followed by, text messaging, Posting on SNS, email, and voice message, respectively.

In addition, 35% (n =76) of the participants said they used a means of technology to break up with a romantic partner. Participants indicated they were mostly use text messaging to break up, followed by, chat/IM, posting on SNS, voice message and email, respectively. See Table 2 for detail.



**Table 2.***Having been the recipient of relationship dissolution via technology and use to break up*

<i>Technology</i>	<i>Recipient Count (N=215)</i>	<i>Use Count (N =215)</i>
<b>Chat/IM</b>	<b>33</b>	25
Email	8	5
Posting on SNS	13	11
<b>Text message</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
Voice message	5	7
Total	87	76

### 1.3. Acceptability of Using Technology to Break up with Romantic Partners

Participants indicated that chat/IM was most acceptable for breaking up, followed by, voice message, posting on SNS, text message and email, respectively. See Table 3 for detail.

**Table 3.***Acceptability of using technology to break up with romantic partners*

<i>Technology</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD) *</i>
<b>Chat/IM</b>	1.49	(1.02)
Email	1.25	(.81)
Posting on SNS	1.30	(.85)
Text message	1.29	(.84)
Voice message	1.40	(1.03)

\* 1 = Not at all to 5 = Definitely

## 2. Results

### 2.1. Gender and Relationship Status Differences in Attachment Styles

It is checked to see if attachment anxiety and avoidance were related to demographic variables. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare attachment anxiety and avoidance by gender. There was no significant difference in the attachment anxiety scores between females ( $M = 67.17$ ,  $SD = 9.51$ ) and males ( $M = 69.50$ ,  $SD = 10.33$ );  $t(213) = -1.46$ ,  $p = .145$ . According to first hypothesis, there was no significant difference in the attachment avoidance scores between females ( $M = 67.36$ ,  $SD = 7.96$ ) and males ( $M = 68.85$ ,  $SD = 9.28$ );  $t(212) = -1.10$ ,  $p = .272$ . Although the male participants had higher scores in attachment anxiety and avoidance than



females did, the results showed that there were no differences in anxiety and avoidance by gender.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare attachment anxiety for having relationship and no relationship. There was a significant difference in the attachment anxiety scores for having relationship ( $M = 65.81$ ,  $SD = 8.90$ ) and no relationship ( $M = 69.52$ ,  $SD = 10.18$ );  $t(213) = -2.84$ ,  $p = .005$ . These results suggest that attachment anxiety differs based on having a relationship or not. Specifically, the results suggest that when participants have a relationship, their attachment anxiety decreases.

Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare attachment avoidance for having relationship and no relationship. There was a significant difference in the attachment avoidance scores for having relationship ( $M = 66.49$ ,  $SD = 7.03$ ) and no relationship ( $M = 68.85$ ,  $SD = 9.20$ );  $t(213) = -2.90$ ,  $p = .037$ . These results suggest that attachment avoidance differs based on the having a relationship or not. Specifically, the results suggest that when participants have a relationship, their attachment avoidance decreases.

## 2.2. Correlations of the Main Variables

For attachment styles, there was a positive and medium level correlation between anxious attachment and avoidant attachment,  $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is not unusual for this measure (Vicary & Fraley, 2007). In addition, acceptability of using technology to break up was associated with anxious attachment,  $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ , and with avoidant attachment,  $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ . Acceptability was not significantly associated with the Attitudes towards Women (ATW) scale,  $r = -.09$ ,  $p > .05$ . See Table 4.

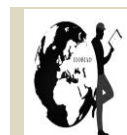
**Table 4.**  
*Correlations of the main variables*

	Anx	Avoid	ATW	Accept
Attachment Anxiety	--	.47***	.05	.21*
Attachment Avoidance		--	-.18**	.26**
Attitudes towards Women			--	-.09
Acceptability				--

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ,

## 2.3. Attachment Style and Gender Role Attitudes Predicted whether or not Someone had Broken up via Technology

Because it was wanted to investigate if certain characteristics predicted whether or not technology was used to break up, it was categorized participants into having been broken up with via technology or not, calling the variable BROKENUP. Similarly, in order to investigate what may be





associated with to use technology to break up, it was created the variable USE comprised of whether or not those participants use any form of technology to break up with a romantic partner. In addition, to assess the relationship of attitudes of acceptability in using technology to break up and other variables of interest, the mean scores were summed across the individual technologies to create an overall acceptability score.

To assess if attachment style and gender role attitudes predicted whether or not someone had broken up via technology with the participants (BROKENUP), we conducted a stepwise logistic regression with attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and ATW score as predictors and BROKENUP as the outcome variable. Only attachment avoidance remained in the equation predicting BROKENUP. See Table 5.

**Table 5.**

*Logistic regression of being broken up with via technology and attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and gender role attitudes.*

	$\beta$ (SE)	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
		Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
<b>Included</b>				
<b>Constant</b>	-8.88(1.81)			
<b>Attachment avoidance</b>	0.70 (0.24)***	1.02	1.07	1.12

Note:  $R^2 = .13$  (Hosmer & Lemeshow),  $.10$  (Cox & Snell),  $.16$  (Nagelkerke).  
1Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 7.96$ ,  $p = .005$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ \*\*\*

On the second logistic regression predicting USE, again attachment avoidance remained in the equation (see Table 6). To predict attitudes of acceptability, we used a stepwise multiple regression with attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and ATW score as predictors.

**Table 6.**

*Logistic regression of using technology to break up with someone and attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and gender role attitudes*

	$\beta$ (SE)	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
		Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
<b>Included</b>				
<b>Constant</b>	2.93 (0.91)			
<b>Attachment avoidance</b>	0.11 (0.02)***	1.05	1.12	1.18

Note:  $R^2 = .17$  (Hosmer & Lemeshow),  $.11$  (Cox & Snell),  $.19$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $\chi^2(1) = 16.03$ ,  $p < .001$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$



The final model indicated that acceptability of using technology to break up with a romantic partner was best predicted by greater attachment avoidance (see Table 7). This finding means that greater attachment avoidance

**Table 7.**

*Multiple linear regression of acceptability of using technology to break up and attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and gender roles*

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>
<b>Constant</b>	-0.57	2.30	
<b>Attachment avoidance</b>	.11	.03	.26**

Note:  $R^2 = .07$  \*\*  $p < .01$

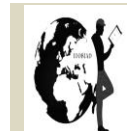
## Conclusion and Discussion

The present study investigated the prevalence of using communication technologies like text messaging, email, and social networking sites in relationship dissolution among Turkish college students. In addition, the study examined the predictive roles of attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and gender role attitudes in relationship dissolution via technology.

Descriptive statistics suggest that approximately all of students have a self-phone, more than half students Chat/IM account, email address, and SNS (facebook/myspace et.) account. As expected, the prevalence of communication technology was high given the demographics of the participants. College educated young adults are among the highest consumers of technology. In addition, across all age groups Turkish men are more likely to use technology than women (TÜİK, 2017). The results from the current study confirm these statistics. Finally, the results illustrate that using voice message is not common among participants. This Turkish telecommunication carriers do not offer free voice mail services. This might lead users of mobile/smart phones to use free alternatives of communicating with one another.

Although male participants reported higher scores in attachment anxiety and avoidance than females did, the results showed that there were no significant differences in anxiety and avoidance by gender. On the other hand, the findings suggest that attachment anxiety and avoidance differ based on relationship status. Specifically, the results suggest that when participants are in a romantic relationship, their attachment anxiety and avoidance decreases. These results might highlight the soothing effect of romantic attachment. According to attachment theory, people who are in secure romantic relationships report less anxiety (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), less depression (Bowlb, 1980), and greater life satisfaction ( Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Feeney, 1994).

In addition, the results showed that more than 40 % (N = 87) had experienced relationship dissolution via technology. Besides, the findings



suggest that many of participants used technology to dissolve a relationship in their relationship. In this study Chat/IM was the most frequent method of delivery of the breakup. This is different than results found with the American sample in the study by Weisskirch and Delevi (2012) where participants were found to be more likely to use text messaging. Participants indicated that chat/IM was most acceptable for breaking up whereas the preferred means for the US sample was voicemail. These differences might be attributable to cross cultural differences. More specifically, in the collectivistic nature of the Turkish culture, interpersonal relations are governed by a deep consideration of others' needs above own (Kagıtcıbası, 2007). So, it could be argued that Turkish culture values mutual and interactive communication style more than the American culture.

Another interesting result of the study was that the usage of the communication technology in relationship dissolution is more than the US sample (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2012). As far as attachment styles as predictors, attachment avoidance was associated with experience of relationship dissolution via technology. Only attachment avoidance significantly predicted greater use of technology to dissolve a relationship in the future. However, for the US sample, the results suggested that only attachment anxiety was predictive of using technology to dissolve romantic relationships. It's also important to note that although the study with the US sample looked at the likelihood of use, in this study we examined the actual use of technology. Finally, in the Turkish sample, attachment avoidance was associated with acceptability of using technology to dissolve a relationship whereas in the US sample both the avoidant and anxious attachments were predictive of accepting technology as a viable option to breaking up. Clearly, there is a difference between the two samples in terms of the association between attachment styles and use of technology to end a relationship. It could be argued that for the Turkish participants, the motivation to use technology to dissolve a relationship via technology is more about avoidance than anxiety. Avoidant attachment in the past has been associated with withdrawing from partners in anxiety-provoking situations (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992), less support seeking (Collins & Feeney, 2000), and being less interested in and being less attentive to the romantic partner (Guerrero, 1996).

The findings in this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the sample is limited in size and in gender. The number of participants is relatively limited and may not be representative of a larger population. Although no gender differences have been found, the sample is predominantly female which may be introducing some bias into the findings. The sample also consists of college students which could also imply a certain economic status in Turkey. Given that cultural values impact



the way we communicate, more studies need to explore how different cultures make use of technology and how this use impacts our relationships.

Dissolving a relationship mediated by technology may be consistent with the kinds of behaviors exhibited by those with avoidant attachments. It could also be speculated that in the Turkish culture where communication and connection are highly valued, it takes participants not to value their relationship or their partner for them to use technology to dissolve their relationship. In other words, it can be argued that only those participants who do not care about their relationships would use technology to end their relationships.

Despite these limitations, this study is one of the first to investigate how young people are using technology to dissolve relationships in Turkey. It could be that relationship dissolution via technology may be indicator of a relationship partner with poor communication and emotional skills. The differences between the US sample and the Turkish sample also highlight the cross-cultural differences in use of phones, texting, and voice mails. Greater understanding of how couples use technology for communication may help public awareness and build interventions to support individuals in relationship skills.

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**“İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Arařtırmaları Dergisi”**  
**“Journal of the Human and Social Sciences Researches”**  
**[itobiad]**

ISSN: 2147-1185