Sharing on social media: The role of self-presentational style and feelings of social anxiety

Introduction

Background

• Social media is increasingly used to strategically construct a desirable image consistent with one's self-concept (Utz et al., 2012)
• Desire to establish or improve one's credibility and status was a strong motivating factor in sharing content (Lee & Ma, 2012)
• Socially anxious people are more comfortable using the Internet to regulate their social concerns (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005)
• Social media offers quantifiable social endorsement in the form of number of likes and shares, which may influence decisions made on social media (Sherman et al., 2016)

Methods

Participants

50 adults (23 males between 18-34 years; Mage = 22.72 years, SD = 3.91).

Materials

• 6 images in each low (1-9) and high (51-60) category (Likes-Shares):
  - Low-Low, Low-High, High-High, High-Low, Moderate-Moderate (control)
• Questionnaires: Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Scale, Revised Self-Monitoring (RSM) Scale.

Procedure

Participants first completed the ‘sharing’ task where they were shown each image for 10s while their eye movements were being tracked. After which, they were asked how likely they were to share it if their friend asked them to. Following the ‘sharing’ task, participants completed the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (M(S.D.))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FNE group</th>
<th>Low (14 M, 11 F)</th>
<th>High (9 M, 16 F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of friends on Facebook</td>
<td>Low FNE</td>
<td>3.60 (1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent on Facebook</td>
<td>Low FNE</td>
<td>2.84 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of sharing</td>
<td>Low FNE</td>
<td>1.36 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of reacting to posts</td>
<td>Low FNE</td>
<td>3.44 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction:

Type of social cue x Number of ‘reactions’ (p < .001, see Fig 2, 3 & 4).

Interaction:

Number of ‘reactions’ x FNE group (p = .006, see Fig 2, 3 & 4).

Interaction:

Type of social cue x Number of ‘reactions’ (p = .025, see Fig 5).

Discussion

This project offers the first key insights into how when making decisions about whether or not to share an image participants will pay attention to the behaviour of others.

• How others have shared previously can be informative.
• High self-monitors use all of the social cues available.
• Those high in FNE were more affected by social endorsements of others than non-socially anxious people.

This study highlights that even within social media those who are interested in the impressions they make and who are concerned with being evaluated negatively will observe the behaviour of others. Future work should explore if this is done as a safety behaviour or for social comparison and how it may regulate the anxiety felt when having online interactions.

References