Impact of Like Count and Need for Attention on Conformity to Social Media Trends

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine if people were more likely to conform to social media trends of high viral status than those with a lower viral status. The sample consisted of 196 participants, over the age of 18 (M = 24.06, SD = 10.12). The study was an experimental design looking to measure Conformity, Need for Attention (Hill, 2015; Stone & Bartholomay, 2022), and Extroversion versus Introversion (Whitman, 1929). Participants accessed the link to the consent form from a social media site before entering the survey. In the survey, one group was shown an image of a post with new seasonal drinks that had a high like count of 12,493, while the other group was shown the same image with a lower like count of 1,560. From there, they answered questions that were used to assess levels of conformity. The results showed an expected significant negative association between Introversion and Extroversion (r = -.43, p < .001) due to the difference between the two personality types. There was also a significant positive correlation between the Interpersonal Orientation Scale (IOS) and Extroversion (r = .44, p < .001), meaning that those who are extroverted are more likely to focus on how others view their behavior. Results also found a significant positive correlation between the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS) and Extroversion (r = .46, p < .001), which means that extroverts are more likely to report higher levels of narcissism than introverts. There was also a significantly positive correlation between the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale and the Interpersonal Orientation Scale (r = .40, p < .001), which means that those who score high on the HSNS scale are more aware of how others view their behavior. Results did not show a significant correlation between conformity and need for attention, however the results did find a significant main effect of higher virality on conformity. What this means is that participants who

were exposed to the higher like count were more likely to conform than those who were exposed to the lower like count. This would imply that people are more willing to follow social media trends that gain a significant amount of attention from others, as opposed to trends that do not gain as much attention.

The Impact of Like Count and Need for Attention on Social Media Conformity

Dangers of Social Media

Social media use is a pervasive part of everyday life. Those who use social media frequently may be at risk for serious negative consequences. People who seek attention on social media (also known as Need for Attention) are more likely to conform to societal expectations or even partake in potentially dangerous trends (Writer, 2023). For example, a famous challenge that revolved around eating tide pods became prevalent sometime in 2018. Due to social media, the challenge got a lot of attention, causing a people to take part in consuming dangerous chemicals for attention (Recovery, 2023). The Tide Pod challenge was similar to the cinnamon challenge, where people would attempt to swallow a tablespoon of cinnamon. This challenge was proven to be dangerous because it caused many participants to choke on the cinnamon, potentially putting their lives at risk (_ApplicationFrame | Children's Minnesota_, 2023).

Another example of why social media is more likely to negatively impact those who seek attention is how far people are willing to go to keep up with beauty trends. Within the United States, it is known that women with more of an hourglass figure (bigger breasts and butt accompanied by a smaller waist) are more likely to receive likes and comments on social media (Skrzypczak et al., 2021). Because of this, it is likely for younger girls who are also seeking attention from social media to try and alter their appearance to look more socially desirable. This may result in younger girls developing eating disorders because they think they are too fat or that no one would be attracted to their body type (_Eating Disorders: Cultural and Social Factors_, n.d.). This may also result in women getting breast/butt implants to look more appealing, without thinking about the possible risk factors they may experience. In

particular, breast implants are known to have resulted in Breast Implant Illness (BII) where patients have reported experiencing symptoms like "fatigue, joint pain, brain fog, and rash." Since researchers are only recently looking into BII, it is not yet considered to be an official medical diagnosis (*Breast Implant Illness (BII): What It Is, Symptoms & Treatment*, n.d.). This makes it difficult to find the best possible treatment for BII, because of how new the problem is.

This study aims to look at how the need for attention influences conformity on social media. Conforming, in this study, would be defined as changing one's own behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes to match social norms (Kashmir, 2023). A major influence on one's behavior, as mentioned above, is the prevalence of social norms created on social media. These social norms influence individuals to conform to gain attention.

The Influence of Social Norms on Social Media

According to a study conducted by Masur and colleagues (Masur et al., 2021) social norms are defined as unspoken rules and standards that are well known by members of society "that guide and/or constrain social behavior without the force of the law." The study also looked at the idea of perceived social norms and how these perceptions can leave individuals with certain expectations of how they should conform to society (Masur et al., 2021). For example, the perceived social norm that attractiveness is defined by having an hourglass shape has influenced the development of eating disorders in men and women to look how they believe society wants them to look (*Eating Disorders: Cultural and Social Factors, 2022)*. A study by Lenny Vartanian and Meghan Hopkins focused on identifying possible reasons for why people internalize societal standards and found that conformity was positively associated with this internalization. The study also mentioned that exposure to social media is what helped develop

these unrealistic beauty standards and influenced these unhealthy eating habits (Vartanian &

Hopkins, 2010). This is because media is so easily accessible to everyone and most of the

pictures getting likes are pictures of men and women who fit these specific beauty standards.

However, a lot of these images are edited to exaggerate certain features, making these standards

unrealistic and unhealthy to achieve. This shows how social norms/societal standards can

influence conformity due to an individual's exposure to social media.

Impact of Social Media on Conformity

As mentioned above, conformity can be easily influenced by social media. A study by

Jaeheung Yoo talks about what influences people to use Twitter, looking at conformity and

social values as being possible reasons. The study found that "social conformity increases the

perceived value of Twitter," (Yoo et al., 2014). What this means is that the more people find

trends as being "acceptable and recommendable," the more likely they are to reshare what they

found. This increases an individual's motivation to participate in the trend and share it on

Twitter. However, the study states that conformity only affects how much information is spread

and shared on social media sites, that does not mean that what is being shared is necessarily

trustworthy or even safe (Yoo et al., 2014). This is how conformity on social media can become

dangerous. The more frequently that dangerous trends/challenges are spread, the more likely

people are to partake in them, putting themselves and others at risk. The reason for this may be

related to a fear of missing out, otherwise known as FoMO. A study conducted by Metin Argan

mentions that FoMO can be viewed as being a "trigger variable" that influences conformity

(Argan et al. 2022).

Sehnaz Baltaci and Abdullah Ragip organized a study looking at the relationship between FoMO and problematic internet use. They defined FoMO as being a specific form of anxiety, where the person is "obsessively" concerned about being left out of social connections that result in gratifying activities. Within the study, they found a significant, positive relationship between FoMO and dangerous internet use in teenagers where teenager's who reported having higher levels of FoMO also reported having higher levels of problematic internet use (Baltaci & Ersoz, 2022). Examples of this could include partaking in dangerous challenges and trends to avoid missing out on these seemingly fun activities that everyone else is doing. The reason that these trends and challenges go viral is because of how much attention they gain from social media.

Impact of Social Media Use on Attention Seekers/Narcissists

As social media has continued to gain relevance in society, attention addiction has also started to increase. According to Francine Edwards' study, the use of Facebook is known to be closely related to narcissism. The reasoning behind this is that on Facebook, one's word choice can be used to get specific responses out of people in order to help satisfy the self-esteem of the individual making the post. Narcissists can then evaluate how well they are admired by their followers by viewing their likes, mentions, and reshares. This can, in turn, result in developing an addiction to attention through these likes, mentions, and reshares. The study states that the strength of gaining likes unintentionally persuades social media users to "go to greater lengths to get noticed by friends and followers" (Edwards, 2017). This is how unhealthy beauty standards spread through social media, influencing these unrealistic expectations of how someone should look based on edited photos of people, simply because they get more likes. The same idea applies to partaking in dangerous challenges.

Summary and Hypotheses

To summarize, this study will be looking at how social media influences one's need to conform based on high viral status and one's own need for attention. To do this, participants will be administered a questionnaire via snowball sampling. They will then gain access to a social media post of novel beverages with either a high or low like count to assess how likely participants are to conform to trends on social media. It is hypothesized that those who are higher on the need for attention will be more likely to conform to social norms on social media in order to gain attention through likes, comments and reshares, than those who are lower on the need for attention. It is also hypothesized that those who are higher on the extraversion scale will also be higher on need for attention, while those who are higher on the introversion scale will be lower on the need for attention. This study also hypothesizes that participants who are exposed to the more viral post will be more willing to conform to the social media trend than those who were exposed to the less viral post.

Method

Participants

Participants were adults aged 18 years and older who were recruited using snowball sampling. Researchers posted the survey on various social media sites (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) and also posted a QR code around Towson University's campus. After completing the survey, participants were asked to share the survey link with other adults who might be willing to participate and/or post it on their own social media.

Measures

Demographics

A questionnaire assessed participant demographics such as age, race/ethnicity, gender, dietary restrictions, and whether participants were a member of the trans community.

Conformity

Conformity was assessed using a questionnaire that was developed specifically for this study. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Less likely, 5 = Extremely likely), participants indicated how likely they were to try a novel beverage advertised on social media and share it with friends, asking questions such as "How likely are you to try one of the drinks," and "How likely are you to tell your friends about the drinks?" In this study, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was .80.

Need for Attention

Need for attention was assessed using the Interpersonal Orientation Scale (IOS) (Hill, 2015) and the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS) (Stone & Bartholomay, 2022). The Interpersonal Orientation Scale assessed emotional support (ES), attention (A), positive stimulation (PS), and social comparison (SC). Both scales were reported as being reliable to assess social motivation within the Interpersonal Orientation Scale (Hill, 2015) and the significant presence of narcissism within the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Stone & Bartholomay, 2022). Using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not at all true, 5= Completely true), participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with 26 statements such as, "I often have a

strong need to be around people who are impressed with what I am like and what I do." In this study, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.88.

Levels of Introversion and Extraversion

Levels of introversion and extroversion were assessed using the Introversion-Extroversion Scale (IES) (Whitman, 1929). This scale was reported as being reliable in assessing human temperament as it relates to levels of introversion and extroversion. Using a 6-point Likert scale (0= does not apply, 5= almost always), participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with 12 statements such as, "I avoid exaggeration when sharing personal experiences." In this study, the Introversion Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.52. The Extraversion Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.58.

Procedures

Participants clicked the link to the survey and were taken to the consent form. Participants then had to indicate their willingness to participate by clicking "Yes, I agree to participate." After agreeing to participate in the survey, the participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions with different ads for frozen beverages ostensibly from Starbucks. The ads had either a high like count (HL) of 12,493 or low like count (LL) of 1,560. The survey was completed in the following order: (i) Demographics; (ii) the manipulation check to ensure that they paid attention to the like count; (iii) Measures of Conformity (MC1; (iv) IOS (Hill, 2015),; (v); (vi) IES (; (vii) HSNS (Stone and

Bartholomay, 2022). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were taken to the debriefing

form. While reading the debriefing form, participants were informed about the true purpose of

the study, specifically that the drinks were not real and that the study assessing levels of

conformity. Finally, participants were then asked to share the link with others who may be

willing to participate.

Results

Demographics Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1. Participants were

primarily Black and female. They had a mean age of 24.06 (SD = 10.122). We removed

participants from the sample if they did not correctly recognize the like count for the ad that

they viewed. We removed 31 participants who did not correctly identify the high like count and

10 participants who did not correctly identify the low like count. There were no differences in

the demographic characteristics between groups.

Correlations Among Variables

Introversion vs. Extroversion

Results revealed a significant negative association between Introversion and Extraversion.

This is because people who are extroverts tend not to be introverts. Please refer to Table 2.

IOS vs. Extroversion

There was also a significant positive correlation between the Interpersonal Orientation Scale and Extroversion. What this means is that those who are extroverted are more likely to conform to social norms because they are mindful of what others think of them. Please refer to Table 2.

HSNS vs. Extroversion

There was a significant positive correlation between Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale and Extroversion. This shows that those who report having higher levels of narcissism are more likely to be extroverts as well. Please refer to Table 2.

HSNS vs. IOS

There was also a significant positive association between the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale and the Interpersonal Orientation Scale. What this is saying is that those who report having higher levels of narcissism are more aware of how others perceive them. Please refer to Table 2.

Impact of Viral Status and Need for Attention on Conformity

Results showed a significant main effect of like count but no significant main effect of need for attention. The interaction between like count and need for attention was also non-significant. Regardless of one's need for attention, participants who were exposed to the higher like count were more likely to conform than those who viewed the ad with the low like count. We did not support our hypothesis that need for attention would interact with like count, however, the like count did significantly impact conformity. Please refer to Graph 1.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The current study tested the hypothesis that high viral status and need for attention influences how likely one is to conform to social media trends. Results failed to fully support our hypothesis, in that need for attention did not have any effect on conformity. However, high virality did have a significant main effect on conformity. Results also found no significant interaction between need for attention and viral status. These findings suggest that need for attention has no influence on conformity, but high virality does.

Prior Research

Our results are consistent with research findings that high virality influences conformity. However, they are inconsistent with research findings that need for attention influences conformity. Our results on virality and conformity extend and replicate prior work by Yoo (2014), who found that posts with more likes and reshares were more likely to continue getting reposted. He also found that people were more likely to partake in social media trends that received more likes and reshares. Although our research showed that need for attention does not impact conformity, it support the idea that people are susceptible to social influence on social media.

Limitations

This study does have its limitations. Confidence in the findings of this research is limited by convenience sampling. This study made use of snowball sampling to get enough participants

within a short time frame. As a result, the study had a relatively homogenous sample in terms of limiting our demographics to others who are similar to us, and thus, similar to each other. This did not allow our demographics to have a more representative sample of the population. Bear in mind that our population consists of social media users, so people who do not have access to the internet would not be relevant. Our research was also limited by the unreliability of our measures. The measures that were used did not validate our hypothesis, as they were measures that we made ourselves. However, they did have good internal reliability. On the other hand, the external validity of our study was also limited due to not giving participants the opportunity to buy the drinks or share the ad through social media.

Implications and Future Directions

Despite these limitations, these findings suggest that high virality does have a significant influence on conforming to social media trends. Future studies should look at the impact of viral status on individuals with different personality types to see whether they would participate in social media trends of higher or lower viral status. Future studies should also conduct a more reliable experimental design that accurately measures conformity by allowing participants to, albeit safely, partake in a challenge or social media trend. This way, future research could rule out intentions over actions by reporting the amount of participants who actually participated in the trend as opposed to reporting the amount of participants who had claimed they would participate in the trend.

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Table 1

Demographics Characteristics

Characteristics	High Like Count	Low Like Count	Sign.	Total Sample
Age	M = 22.31 SD = 7.695	M = 24.56 SD = 10.30	0.41	M =24.06 SD =10.122
Racial Identification • White/Caucasian • Black/African American • Asian • Pacific Islan	White/C. = 39.6 Black/A= 42.6 Asian PI/Nat= 2.1 Native A. = 2.1 Bi/Multi = 14.9 Other =4.3	White/C. = 36 Black/A = 50.7 Asian PI/Nat= 4.0 Native A. = 0 Bi/Multi = 9.3 Other = 0	. 341	White = 35.2 Black= 47.5 Asian PI/Nat= 3.3 Native A. = 0.8 Bi/Multi = 11.5 Other = 1.6

der/ Native Hawaiian ● Native American/Alaska Native ● Bi-Multi-Racial ● Write in your race (other)				

Latinx /H ispanic (% yes)	8.5	9.3	. 877	9.0
Memb er of Trans Community (% yes)	4.2	6.7	. 559	5.7%
Gende r Identity • Man • Wom an	Man = 21.3	Man = 22.7 Woman = 74.7	. 947	Man = 22.1 Woman = 75.6

Characterist ics	Group 1 HL	Group 2 LL	Signif ic ance	Total Sample
Age	M = 22.31 SD =7.695	M = 24.56 SD = 10.30	0.41	M =24.06 SD =10.122

Racial Identification • White/Caucasian • Black/African American • Asian • Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian iian	White/C. = 39.6 Black/A= 42.6 Asian PI/Nat= 2.1 Native A. = 2.1 Bi/Multi = 14.9 Other =4.3	White/C. =36 Black/A =50.7 Asian PI/Nat= 4.0 Native A. = 0 Bi/Multi = 9.3 Other = 0	341	.	White = 35.2 Black= 47.5 Asian PI/Nat= 3.3 Native A. = 0.8 Bi/Multi = 11.5 Other = 1.6

- Native American/Alaska Native - Bi-Multi-Racial - Write in your race (other)				
Non-Binary	Woman = 72.3 Non-Binary = 6.4	Non-Binary = 2.7		Non-Binary = 2.4

Note: HL (High Like Count). LL (Low Like Count).

Graph 1

Impact of Need for Attention and Viral Status on Conformity

Note: NFA (Need for Attention).

Table 2

Correlation Between Variables

	Introversion	Extroversion	IOS	HSNS	Conformity
Introversion					
Extroversion	r = -.43**, p < .05				
IOS	r = -.18, p > .05	r = .44**, p < .05			
HSNS	r = -.08, p > .05	r = .46**, p < .05	r = .40**, p < .05		
Conformity	r = -.11, p > .05	r = .09, p > .05	r = .07, p > .05	r = -.08, p > .05	

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). IOS (Interpersonal Orientation Scale). HSNS (Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale).