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Abstract

A number of studies have examined the motives behind the use of one-click communication features such as the "like" button. This study considered how personality might shape how users employ the "liking" button in order to establish different online impressions, particularly when online posts include both everyday (normal) or risky (controversial) content. Using an online survey, we tested whether self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity seeking and need for gratification would influence the likelihood with which participants would "like" posts given the transparent nature of social networks. Results based on an online sample (N=217) revealed that "liking" of normal posts was positively predicted by agreeableness and need for gratification. However, only need for gratification positively predicted "liking" of controversial posts. This indicates that the content of the post as well as the personality characteristics play a role in online one-click interaction, reflecting different means to manage impressions online.

Introduction

Social media networks serve numerous functions. Individuals can generate profiles that allow them to stay in touch with personal and professional contacts, allowing them to share updates and information with one another (boyd and Ellison, 2007). There are a number of different options available to the user to express approval or dislike for what is posted. These features are routinely used on a daily basis by many social network users (Brandtzaeg and Haugstveit, 2014). A well-known example of such one-click communication features is Facebook's and LinkedIn's "like" button (Hayes, Carr, and Wohn, 2015). This allows users to use a single-click phatic feature that can be interpreted as a sign of approval and agreement to the status update and the poster (Hayes, Carr, and Wohn, 2015). On Twitter, the users have the options to click "favorite" (see work by Meier, Elsweiler, and Wilson, 2014), which was also replaced by the "like" button with a small heart in November 2015. On Google plus, liking can be expressed by using "+1".

Several researchers and bloggers have already considered the meaning of such one-click communication features. One interpretation is that these "likes" or "favorites" represent "a virtual pat on the back" (Pauw, 2014), a feature that has become increasingly popular for a range of purposes, which include showing approval and agreement, prompting others to follow you (on Twitter), expressing dislike by using the "favorite" feature sarcastically, and even confirming reading a tweet (see also Hanley, 2014; Smock et al, 2011). Other explanations for using such features are to give (1) a contact a quick and easy nod, (2) to affirm something about ourselves and 3) to express virtual empathy (Seiter, 2015). These reports suggest that this simple feature serves multiple functions and can reveal important aspects about how social network users respond as well as the influence of different personality traits. Therefore, the use of these features is an example of intentional and conscious self-disclosure that can serve the purpose of self-presentation and advantageous impression management (see also Spiekermann et al., 2010).

The difficulty in the interpretation of behaviours such as "liking" may be further attributable to the following: users respond to posts depending on the context (e.g., social norms, see Hayes et al., 2015), the type of relationship with the user posting the update, and the content of the posts. The potential for interactions between the variables may be amplified online, given the complex and transparent nature of interactions on social media. The focus of the current paper

is to study how individuals using social media respond to different kind of posts. That is, posts may feature general and everyday content as well as controversial content not in line with the social norm. Giving likes to those controversial posts might endanger one's image from a third person's perspective. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of personality in predicting the likelihood of liking giving likes with regard to different types of "liking" (normal vs. controversial posts). The next section provides an overview of how impression management may be pursued, driven by personality traits and potentially related to "liking" of various posts.

Impression management, personality and "liking"

Impression management has been defined as "conscious or unconscious attempts to influence images during interaction" (Gilmore, Stevens, Harrell-Cook, and Ferris, 1999, p. 322). Impression management encompasses all means and tools that individuals use in a conscious or unconscious manner in order to influence the impression that others have of them (Reber, 1995). Individuals who score higher on impression management - usually captured via self-monitoring scales - are more attentive to the various social expectancies that may operate in different social contexts (Hogan, 1991). A variety of different dimension seem to make up this construct, such as the ability to adjust self-presentation and performance, as well as being attentive and sensitive to the expressive behaviours exhibited by others (Estow, Jamieson, and Yates, 2007).

In the online context, impression management may also include attempts to be noticed, to be acknowledged, and to appear more attractive to others (e.g., Delery and Kacmar, 1998; Howard and Ferris, 1996). The interconnected and transparent nature of most social networks enables social network users not only to engage with their contacts, but also allows their contacts to observe each other's online interactions and behaviours. Many social networks actually allow others to see what users have "liked". For those concerned with how they are perceived by others, impression management concerns are likely to arise. Many organizations have started to view the social network profiles of prospective applicants (Chiang and Suen, 2015; Muscanell, 2013) and assess the image that these applicants may present on professional networks and settings (Posey et al., 2010; Sievers et al., 2015). In response, social network users have thus started to recognize the importance of managing impressions online and adopted appropriate and potentially selective, idealized or realistic self-presentation strategies online (Gosling et al., 2011; Harman et al., 2005; Krämer and Winter, 2008; Misoch, 2015; Muscanell, 2013; Seidman, 2013; Sievers et al., 2015). This may be due to the fact that social network users often may have personal and professional contexts on their contact list. This creates the problem of "context collapse" (Marwick and boyd, 2011). In other words, participants may be concerned about the reactions from different audiences.

Impression management may also influence what kind of content social network users will "like" online. This then publicizes his or her actions to more than just the person whose post he or she "likes". For example, users may come across posts published by their network that they may view as *controversial*. That is, the posts may outline unethical, unhealthy, or socially-disapproved behaviour or perspectives. By "liking" controversial posts, the respondent risks creating an image that impacts their positive impression management. Such "likes" may even affect the relationships with other contacts. That is, the more controversial the content, the greater the risk that a "like" may offend or alienate a valued social network contact who does not endorse the controversial content of the post.

A particularly relevant personality characteristic in relation to impression management is self-monitoring (see Moser and Galais, 2007). Self-monitoring has been defined as the extent to which an individual is able to adjust his or her presentation in social situations and respond

by adjusting performance in order to achieve a desirable impression (Hogan, 1991). Higher self-monitoring is associated with greater sensitivity to social cues and impression management (Caldwell and O'Reilly, 1982; Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Snyder, 1974). Self-monitoring essentially represents the propensity to engage in impression management in order to be viewed favourably by others (Moser and Galais, 2007; Turnley and Bolino, 2001). Greater behavioural variability and sensitivity to expectations and other cues is therefore a characteristic of high self-monitors, which goes hand in hand with evidence on their more frequent use of impression management tactics to construct desirable social appearances (Estow, Jamieson, and Yates, 2007; Gangestad and Snyder, 2000). Self-monitoring may therefore reduce such controversial "liking" of posts and instead increase the "liking" of normal posts issued by their network.

A number of other personality characteristics may also influence the likelihood with which individuals will "like" potentially normal vs. controversial posts, specifically affinity-seeking and agreeableness. Affinity-seeking is also relevant here. High affinity seekers tend to foster more positive impressions and relationships with contacts on social media (Lee, Moore, Park, and Park, 2012), which may increase the likelihood of these individuals "liking" normal. However, fear of negative evaluation (see Leary, 1983) may reduce their "liking" of potentially controversial posts online. Agreeableness is also related to affinity-seeking, as both strive towards accommodating others. Social media users with greater agreeableness tend to provide more frequent emotional support to others (Ivcevic and Ambady, 2013). Their focus appears to be on maintaining a positive and helpful image. This suggests that these users are more likely to "like" normal posts in order to maintain this positive image. At the same time, low agreeableness may predict greater "liking" of controversial posts in line with research linking low agreeableness to more badmouthing behaviour online (Stoughton et al., 2013).

Two more characteristics may influence social networking behaviour such as "liking" of both normal and controversial posts. First, the need for gratification – a need to be rewarded for behaviours, quick or immediate feedback – may also play a role (Teo, 2013). Immediate feedback online may help social network users to meet their social connection needs, resulting in the perception of an actual and live social presence of others while being online (see work by Han, Min, and Lee, 2015). A greater need for instant gratification and reward may also increase "liking" behaviour for both controversial as well as normal posts. Second, age has also been linked to more sensation seeking and risk taking. As a results, younger social network users also engage in more risky decision making online (Rolison, Hanoch, and Wood, 2012), which may also increase their tendency to "like" controversial (risky) content online.

Rationale and hypotheses

We propose that given the complex nature of online interaction, the motives for using "like" may also be driven by specific personality characteristics of the social network users. Therefore, rather than considering the motivations behind the use of specific features or platforms (e.g., Meier et al, 2014), we look at a number of personality traits as predictors of "liking" different content in order to try and understand motives and purpose behind content-specific "liking". This rationale is, in part, based on some previous work that has demonstrated that "likes" can predict certain personality traits (see work by Stillwell, Kosinski, and Tunney, 2011). Nevertheless, there is little research to date about how "liking" may be subject to the type of post content and different personality traits (such as self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity-seeking, and need for gratification).

In this study, we will explore the relationships between the pre-mentioned personality traits and the perceived usefulness of "likes". Given the evidence that "like" is a means by which social network users can express themselves (e.g., as a means of acknowledgment and approval;

see Hanley, 2014; Pauw, 2014; Smock et al, 2011), we would expect all our traits to correlate with greater perceived usefulness. We ask the following question: To what extent does a social media user's personality predict likelihood of "liking" controversial and normal posts? In line with the literature review, we propose to test the second hypotheses with two separate hypotheses:

Hyp. 1: "Liking" of normal posts is positively predicted by self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity-seeking and need for gratification.

Hyp. 2: "Liking" of controversial posts is negatively predicted by self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity-seeking, age and positively predicted by need for gratification.

Method

Participants

Data collection involved two different samples and took place in the beginning of 2015. The first dataset included a UK student sample. The second dataset was based on a Facebook convenient sample. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old and hold at least one social media account. Following deletions of drop-puts, the final sample (N=217) included 46 males and 157 female participants (14 missing values). The overall average age was 24 years (M = 24.02, SD = 9.33, n = 203; 14 missing values). The UK sample composed of students with an average age of 19 (M = 19.88, SD = 2.58, n = 137). The Facebook convenience sample had an average age of 32 years old (M = 32.62, SD = 12.06, n = 66). The large majority of participants had used at least one social networking site for at least 3 years (n=190). Only a small minority (n=19) had used such sites between up to 6 months and 3 years. Participants (n = 73) spend at least 1-3 hours online, 4-6 hours (n = 65), 6-8 hours (n = 29), 9-10 hours (n = 19) or even more than 11 hours per day online (n = 6).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via email invitation and an announcement on a university research portal. Once participants gave consent, participants completed several measures regarding their likely responding to normal or controversial posts. This was followed by several personality measures. At the end, participants completed several questions about their social media use and demographics.

Measures

The study collected information about how participants used the features of social networks, the extent to which they engaged in strategic behaviours as well as numerous personality measures. Unless specified, all items were used to create mean-centred scale composites that had the same range as the original items in each scale.

Controversial post "liking". "Liking" of potentially controversial content was assessed using ten risk-involving scenarios from the Domain-Specific Risk-Attitude Scale (Weber, Blais, and Betz, 2002), including six ethical-related items, three health-related items, and one social-related item. An example of an ethical-related items is "Illegally copying a piece of software", and an example of health-related items is "Riding a motorcycle without a helmet"; and the social-related item is "Defending an unpopular issue that you believe in at a social occasion". In each case, respondents were asked to what extent they would "like" posts containing controversial/risky content, with response options ranging from (1) "very unlikely" to (5) "very

likely". A composite for controversial "liking" was created based on all ten items, with higher values representing greater tendency to "like" potentially controversial posts (α = .76, M = 1.54, SD = .42). In addition, two subscales were created, one for controversial "liking" of health-related posts (based on two out of three highly correlated items, r = .579, p<.001, M = 1.28, SD = .50) and another for "liking" of ethics-related posts (α =.82, M = 1.30, SD = .45). The one-item social item had a slightly higher average (M = 3.01, SD = 1.33).

Normal post "liking". In addition to the controversial content items, participants also responded to six other items with 'normal' content (e.g., no content that could be perceived as controversial and risky in social interactions). These included the following items: (1) "Announcing the birth of his/her first child," (2) "Thanking everybody who remembered his/her birth," (3) "Reporting on how the house move is going," (4) "Getting called in to attend an interview for a new job," (5) "Talking about a new hobby that he/she is taking up," and (6) "Inviting contacts to a party/social event." The same response options were used as those employed for the controversial items. All items were combined into one composite scale that had good reliability ($\alpha = .73$, M = 3.31, SD = .71).

Self-monitoring. This was assessed using 10 of 13 items from the self-monitoring scale by Lennox and Wolfe (1984), the wording was slightly adjusted. Three items were excluded (as these assumed face-to-face interactions) to ensure that the new scale could be applied to the online context as well. An example item in the final item list is: "I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them". Higher values composite reflect greater self-monitoring. The scale featured a six-point Likert scale ranging from (0) "certainly, always false" to (5) "certainly, always true" ($\alpha = .77$, M = 4.30, SD = .56).

Affinity seeking. This was assessed using five items from the strategic performance subscale from the Affinity-Seeking instrument (Bell, Tremblay, and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987). An example item is "When necessary, I can put on an act to get important people to approve of me". The second item was reverse-scored. The scale composite was created using all five items. Higher scores reflect higher affinity-seeking. The scale ranged from (1) "disagree strongly" to (7) "agree strongly" ($\alpha = .81$, M = 4.43, SD = 1.05).

Agreeableness. Four items were selected from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) to measure agreeableness. An example item for measuring agreeableness is "I make people feel at ease". A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" ($\alpha = .69$, M = 3.74, SD = .56).

Need for instant gratification/feedback online. Four items were used to assess the extent to which individuals thrive on instant gratifications and rewards (Teo, 2013). An example item is: "I expect quick access to information when I need it." Respondents were asked to rate them on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "disagree strongly" to (7) "agree strongly". Higher values on this scale reflect a greater expectation and need for instant feedback and gratification while online ($\alpha = .62$, M = 5.36, SD = .79).

Usefulness "liking" function. In order to measure the perceived usefulness of the function of "liking", three items were amended from a study by Kuo, Tseng, Tseng, and Lin (2013). These three items were: (1) "By using 'Like', I am able to communicate easily that I agree with a statement" (M = 3.52, SD = .56); (2) "By using 'Like', I have the ability to regulate the flow of communication between my communication partner and myself (e.g. by showing that I have read / seen the message)" (M = 3.12, SD = .66); and (3) "By using 'Like', I can avoid topics that I don't want to discuss in detail" (M = 2.61, SD = .89). The item had four response options ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree").

Demographic information. In order to describe our sample and also consider potential differences between the two subsamples, participants were asked to report their age, gender,

nationality, ethnicity, and general care responsibilities (children, vulnerable adults) - as responsibilities for others may influence participants' posting and "liking" behaviour online. There was no evidence that these factors played a role (except for gender, controlled for in our analyses).

Results

Reliability and Descriptives

The correlations are shown in Table 1. Two scales showed low reliability (Cronbach's α is above .6 but still below .7, see Nunnally, 1978). Skew and kurtosis values suggest positive skew for age and all risky liking scales above 1 (except for social risky liking). However, as the skew values did not exceed 2.49 for any of the scales. Z-values indicated that at the most 5.5% of the sample (N=217) had z-values above 1.96 (p<.05). Given the large sample (n>200) and these findings, the data was not transformed to correct for skew (see also Field, 2005). However, for the sake of clarity, the correlations include provide both Pearson's and Spearman's rho coefficients (Table 1). No other issues were found in terms of the normality and linearity of the scales. Since two different subsamples (UK student sample and a Facebook convenience sample) were used, the first assessment considered the extent to which the two subsamples differed in terms of their characteristics. The UK student sample featured significantly more women than the Facebook sample, while the Facebook convenience sample featured more men than the UK sample ($\chi^2(1) = 18.584$, p<.001). The Facebook sample was significantly older than the UK sample (F(1,201) = 140.278, MS = 7227.215, p<.001, $\eta_p^2 = .411$).

Due to the relatively high correlation between self-monitoring and affinity-seeking (r=.6, p<.01), LISREL 9.20 was used to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of the subscales measuring self-monitoring and affinity-seeking. Our results provide stronger support for a two-factor structure ($\chi^2(89) = 284.53$, p<.001; RMSEA = .10, 90% CI [.09, .11], SRMR=.9, CFI=.81, and NFI=.75). The model fit improved further as soon as we allowed modifications between items of the same subscale. All items loaded significantly onto the factors (one for self-monitoring and one for affinity-seeking, ps<.05). The model fit statistics for a one-factor structure incorporating all self-monitoring and affinity-seeking items was significantly worse ($\chi^2(90) = 343.69$, p<.001; RMSEA = .12, 90% CI [.10, .13], SRMR=.11, CFI=.76, and NFI=.70; $\Delta\chi^2$ =59.16, p<.05). All items loaded significantly onto the one factor (p<.05) in line with the correlation observed between the two scales. As a result, we decided to retain the two subscales rather than merging the self-monitoring and affinity-seeking items into one scale.

-- Insert Table 1 here -

In the first step, we analysed whether or not the perceived usefulness or expressiveness of the "like" function is also correlated with different personality traits. The correlations matrix provides further insight here: Self-monitoring correlated positively with "liking" being seen as a means to communicate more easily with contacts ("like" function 1: r=.189, p=.005), informing others that their posts have been read ("like" function 2: r=.181, p=.012) and potentially avoid discussing topics at length ("like" function 3: r=.238, p<.001). Agreeableness similarly correlated with these three functions of "like" (r>.177, p<.01). Affinity seeking similarly correlated greater perceived ease of communication ("like" function 1: r=.175, p=.010) and as a means to avoid discussion ("like" function 3: r=.254, p<.001), while only

marginally in terms of regulating communication with others ("like" function 2: r=.130, p=.057). Need for gratification was positively correlated with "like" function 3: "Liking" as a means to inform others that their posts have been read (r=.150, p=.029).

Hypothesis Testing

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 (Table 2). Hypothesis 1 predicted that "liking" of normal posts would be positively predicted by self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity-seeking and need for gratification. We obtained only partial support for our hypothesis: Agreeableness and need for gratifications were indeed positive predictors of the likelihood with which participants' would "like" normal (non-controversial) posts. Only a marginally significant result was obtained for affinity seeking. Self-monitoring was not a significant predictors of "liking" normal posts.

-- Insert Table 2 here --

These results suggest that participants wishing to have good relationships with other individuals (e.g., those who scored highly on agreeableness) and those seeking instant feedback and gratification online were more likely to "like" normal posts. In terms of impression management, the results suggest that agreeableness may capture attempts to create positive impressions. This may also explain why greater affinity-seeking tendency (those keen to build relationships) was a marginally significant and positive predictor "liking" normal posts as well. In addition, a more pronounced need for feedback (gratification) may be the result of individuals wanting to be noticed by others. "Liking" normal posts may cater to this need to be noticed and gain the attention of others.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that "liking" of controversial posts would be negatively predicted by self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity-seeking and positively predicted by need for gratification and age. We obtained only partial support for our hypothesis: Only need for feedback and gratification was a significant a positive predictor of "liking" controversial posts, in line with hypothesis 2. Self-monitoring, agreeableness, affinity seeking and age were not significant predictors. Younger participants were not more likely to "like" controversial posts than older participants.

Controversial "Liking": Type differences

In the next step, we conducted the same analysis as for hypothesis 2 with the controversial item subscales. The results showed that agreeableness was a negative predictor of the likelihood of "liking" health-related posts (see hypothesis 2). Need for gratification positively predicted "liking" of posts that described unethical behaviours if not health and socially controversial behaviour (results in Table 3).

-- Insert Table 3 here --

Due to the correlation between self-monitoring and affinity seeking, all analyses were also run separately. The exclusion of either variable in the regression analyses did not change the results reported in Table 2 and 3.

Discussion

Past research suggests that single click features such as "likes" are affordances that enables interactions amongst the users on a social network sites, allowing for both self-presentation and mass communication in one (Walther et al., 2011). The current study attempted to build on this research as to what motivates "liking". We first explored whether or not the perceived usefulness of "like" correlated with different personality traits. The correlations suggest that our participants' personality appeared to be related, at least to a small degree, the perceived usefulness of the "like" function. We obtained further evidence that some personality traits influence potentially impression management-related "liking" of different posts. Selfmonitoring and agreeableness were both positively related to all functions, including the fact that "liking" makes it easier to communicate, provide acknowledgement, and potentially minimize the need for further discussion. Most of the results, if not all, were linked to affinity seeking and need for gratification. This suggests that the personality traits of online users do, at least to a small degree, relate to how useful they find the features to express themselves online.

The main research question asked to what extent a social media user's personality predicts the likelihood their "liking" normal and controversial posts online. Both agreeableness and need for gratifications were positive predictors of the likelihood with which participants' would "like" normal (non-controversial) posts. These results are in line with previous research on the need for gratification influencing social network behaviour (e.g., Han et al., 2015). Individuals with high-level agreeableness tend to care about what others may think of them and adopt a friendlier disposition (Eftekhar et al., 2014; Stoughton et al., 2013). Only a marginally significant and positive result was obtained for affinity seeking, providing at least some tentative support for the idea that affinity-seeking may be linked to social capital building (Mo and Leung, 2015) and relationship maintenance (Lee et al., 2012). It is possible that our participants were able to meet their social interaction needs through their immediate social network, reducing their affinity-seeking behaviour online (see work on social interaction needs by Smock et al., 2011).

However, in contrast to our expectations, the results of the first hypothesis regarding the "liking" of normal posts suggested that self-monitoring is not significant predictors of "liking" normal posts. A number of different explanations may be put forward. First, high self-monitors may be more aware about the need to monitor their reputation online. As a result, they may reflect on whether or not "liking" a post contributes to the positive image they wish to maintain. While the regression coefficients were not significant, in all cases, they were negative. It is possible that social network users are quite aware of the fact that all their "likes" may be misinterpreted. Second, this was a hypothetical scenario in which participants with higher selfmonitoring tendencies were not provided the social cues that they would have potentially needed. Indeed, without specifying a target for impression management, self-monitoring may not have played a key role in terms of the posts overall. And third, participants may have had different relationships with the social network contacts. Despite their ability to interact positively with everybody, high self-monitors have been shown to maintain fewer close personal or work relationships (Day and Kilduff, 2004). This might also play out online. Recent work suggests that more public sharing of information leads to stronger attitudes towards individuals on social media (see Johnson and van der Heide, 2015). This may actually work counter self-monitoring efforts, reducing the willingness of high self-monitors to share information about themselves, potentially even "like" posts. And lastly, one alternative is that impression management is not the main motive per se for using "like" – maybe the main motive is to be noticed when possible, irrespective of whether or not this attention leads to positive or negative impression (a particularly prominent characteristics for individuals with higher need for gratification and feedback).

In conclusion, agreeableness and affinity may play a role in "liking" behaviour of normal posts, each trait potentially outlining an effort to manage impressions with others: To be perceived as congenial or available to meet the needs of other (agreeableness and affinity seeking). This suggests that users with greater agreeableness and affinity seeking may put much more emphasis on "pleasing others" (see also Lee et al, 2015), which then increases their extent to which they would "like" normal posts. What is more, need for gratification also emerged as an important variable reported to influence use of "likes" in the work by Hayes et al (2015). It appeared to be driving "liking" of posts that covered normal posts and unethical behaviours (but not health or socially controversial behaviours). "Liking" normal as well as controversial posts may cater to this need to be noticed and gain the attention of others. Engaging more with other users may make certain online users more distinct and increase their noticeability (and potentially notoriety), resulting in stronger attitudes about these individuals as well (see public sharing effect on attitude formation in Johnson and van der Heide, 2015). Therefore, offering privacy setting options, such as grouping and selectively sharing, is also important for the function of "like".

And finally, we had expected that when the content of a post is controversial, those with highly agreeable and high self-monitors as well as older social network users may be less likely to click "like" as "liking" controversial posts may negatively impact their attempts to build social capital (Mo and Leung, 2015) or contradict social norms found in online community and social networks (Hayes et al., 2015). However, neither self-monitoring, agreeableness nor age were significant negative predictors (but note that all coefficients were negative). This further suggests that the contents of posts do play a role, certainly in terms of whether or not participants with greater agreeableness will respond to positive content.

Contributions

Our research has several important implications for the research studying online impression management (see work by Hall et al., 2014). Past research has already demonstrated the complexity of meaning behind online behaviours such as "liking" (Hayes et al., 2015) as the use of such features cannot always be linked to particular motives (see also Meier et al., 2014; Smock et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2014). Meier et al. (2014) described the use of Twitter's "favorite" function as 'repurposing.' In other words, users may be using one and the same feature online for numerous different reasons, obfuscating which motives is driving the use of this feature (Smock et al, 2011).

Our research results provided at least some understanding for this complexity. We proposed that some personality traits may help understand what motivates "liking", at least to a small degree. Our focus was less on motives per se but understanding how impression management motives, potentially expressed by different personality traits, would influence "liking" of different content. Our regression analyses show that some people may engage in "liking" as a form of impression management, but for different reasons: e.g., to be viewed as more likeable and approachable (affinity seeking), to maintain positive relationships (agreeableness), and to be noticed and visible to others (need for gratification).

We should also note that our nonsignificant findings about self-monitoring may be important for two reasons. First, in terms of impression management, particularly amongst high self-monitors, it is possible that some social network users are increasingly focusing on responding in more detail only to non-ambiguous posts that come from people known to them.

This would reduce the potential of misunderstandings. This makes it difficult to determine which impression management motive might be influencing which behaviour. Second, the online context may actually decrease the potential predictability of this trait. Some research suggests that high self-monitors display behaviours which lack predictability (Snyder, 1974) as they are influenced more by external cues than internal cues (Blakely, Andrews, and Fuller, 2003), which means behaviours vary across situations which makes it harder to see consistent behavioural patterns. This suggests that in online context, it may be more difficult to find any trends when using self-monitoring compared to other traits such as agreeableness, affinity seeking or need for gratification.

Several methodological limitations apply to the current research. Some of the compared groups were quite small, as were some of the effect sizes. The explained variances were low, which may affect the extent to which certain relationships could be detected. Others include participant familiarity with various controversial and normal posts, the frequency with which they themselves post such news or see such posts on their social media outlets. Some controversial posts may also differ in terms of the degree to which they raise significant self-presentation concerns (Gosling et al., 2011; Harman et al., 2005; Sievers et al., 2015).

Future research

"Liking" of posts may also be driven by assumed, implied or actual similarity – as a function of the amount of knowledge social network users have about one another. While some evidence suggests that social network users have met their contacts offline (see Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007), this may not be the case for all contacts, particularly when social networks are used to connect to others for professional purposes (e.g., LinkedIn). Future research may wish to consider measuring similarity and impression management in relation to contacts that the social network users have never met but stay in contact with due to mutual connections or common interests. In addition, post content may reflect different goals: relational development, social validation, self-expression (see Bazarova and Choi, 2014). Not all social network users would respond to these equally, particularly when the posts may be affectively biased (negative or positive news, reflecting potential controversial and everyday events and behaviours of the user posting the update).

Past work has suggested that the perceived likeability and prototypicality of online contacts may also play a role in terms of how people engage with and evaluate the content posted by these contacts (see work by Mou, Miller and Fou, 2015; Weisbuch, Ivcevic and Ambady, 2009). Our selected "liking" measures were very broad and not contact-specific, which may have played a role in terms of the nonsignificant results observed for self-monitoring as this tends to influence other-directed behaviour.

The focus in this study was to examine the likelihood of "liking", rather than the specific meaning of the "likes" or "liking" practices. These practices may be worth exploring further. Brandtzaeg and Haugstveit (2014), for example, used content analysis to identify six different "liking" reasons for humanitarian causes such as emotional or information "liking". While our paper focus on liking as a means to build and maintain relationship, we acknowledge that "liking" may also be self-serving and thus potentially manipulative. Future work may wish to test these scenarios and compare the results to normal/controversial posts to examine how much the content and different motives drive "liking" behaviour. Finally, we only consider interpersonal "liking" instead of "liking" of (commercial) public pages (see work by Wallace et al, 2014). It would be interesting to research the extent to which "liking" commercial pages differs to "liking" personal posts.

Conclusions

The use of social media for both private and professional reasons is on the increase. This also increases the need to understand which factors drive online engagement and user interaction on these sites. The current paper examines the extent to which motives captured by personality traits (e.g., impression management, the need to receive feedback, the need to be close to and have good relationships with other people) influence the degree to which social media users will "like" content that may be controversial or even risky in relatively transparent social settings such as social networks. Evidence from our study suggests that when content reflects everyday events and activities, greater agreeableness and need for gratification increases content "liking". However, when the posts may be potentially controversial in terms of the actions they reference (which may be potentially unethical, unhealthy and asocial — thus triggering potentially negative impressions amongst other contacts on social media), content "liking" of controversial posts is higher amongst individuals who also crave gratification and instant feedback, while those seeking positive relationships (e.g., more agreeable individuals) were significantly less likely to "like" these pages.

The current findings therefore build on previous research on how social media interactions and use of features on these platforms may be influenced by content and user's motives and hence their personality. At the same time, it is clear that more research is needed to consider how the "panoptic" nature of these networks may in and of itself influence users' interaction. The current study provided some first exploratory evidence, but more work is needed for two reasons. First, without gaining a better understanding of these influencers and questioning assumptions (e.g., about the importance or irrelevance of impression management in online settings), it is unlikely that we can really understand the complex nature of how online interactions, identities and relationships are negotiated. And second, without further efforts to study social media behaviour and users, it is unlikely that we gain a reliable as well as accurate understanding of other people's online behaviour and interaction with user-generated content – as demonstrated in terms of the content-specific use of specific social media features, such as the "like" button, in this study.

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RUNNING HEAD: Content-dependent "liking" on social media

Table 1: Correlations between individual differences, "liking" usefulness, and post "liking"

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Self-monitoring	1	.251**	.614**	.090	135	.168*	.114	.224**	.148*	079	161*	147*	.028
2. Agreeableness	.291**	1	.224**	006	113	.209**	.164*	.181**	.188**	044	108	094	.053
3. affinity-seeking	.648**	.193**	1	.059	166 [*]	$.157^{*}$	$.146^{*}$.251**	.198**	.065	041	024	.077
4. Need for	.090	.015	.059	1	119	.091	$.151^{*}$	$.144^{*}$.203**	.253**	.057	.166*	$.157^{*}$
5. Age	073	053	185**	152*	1	.013	085	151*	093	053	.095	.025	012
6. "like" fct (easy	.189**	.182**	.175*	.060	.044	1	.317**	.173*	.214**	.008	178**	060	$.167^{*}$
7. "like" fct (message	$.171^*$.177**	.130	$.150^{*}$	077	.341**	1	.277**	.219**	.088	114	.038	$.180^{**}$
8. "like" fct (keep it	.238**	.194**	.254**	.130	173*	$.147^{*}$.259**	1	$.176^{*}$.164*	008	.095	.185**
9. Normal liking	$.144^{*}$.206**	.211**	.208**	178*	.212**	.245**	$.174^{*}$	1	.198**	.018	.069	.305**
10. Controversial	034	087	.048	.235**	016	024	.062	.106	.120	1	.636**	.780**	.563**
11. Controversial	093	185**	044	.087	.094	210**	127	012	040	.669**	1	.533**	.104
12. Controversial	059	099	035	$.166^{*}$.032	048	.026	.050	.004	.903**	.559**	1	.196**
13. Controversial	.039	.058	.096	.166*	023	.146*	.165*	$.170^{*}$.329**	.472**	.084	.215**	1

Note. N=217 (except for strategic liking, N=192). *p < .05, **p < .01. Like_fct1: By using "Like", I am able to communicate easily that I agree with a statement. Like_fct2: By using "Like", I have the ability to regulate the flow of communication between my communication partner and myself (e.g. by showing that I have read / seen the message). Like_fct3: By using "Like", I can avoid topics that I don't want to discuss in detail. Skew and kurtosis values suggest positive skew for age and all risky liking scales above 1 (except for social risky liking). However, as the skew values did not exceed 2.49 for any of the scales. As a result, the data was not transformed to correct for skew. The correlations below the diagonal include Pearson correlation coefficients. We include Spearman's rho correlation coefficients above the diagonal to provide an overview of non-parametric equivalent coefficients due to the significant skew values. The correlation results are largely identical.

Table 2: Regression results for hypothesis 1 and 2 (normal and controversial "liking")

	Normal and controversial "Liking"						
	Norr	nal posts	Contro	oversial posts			
	$R^2\Delta$	β	$R^2\Delta$	β			
Step 1	.06**		.91				
Control variables							
Step 2	.10**		.09**				
Self-monitoring		019		093			
Agreeableness		.203*		080			
Affinity seeking		$.104^{t}$.064 ^t			
Need for gratification		.149*		.121**			
Age		005		.000			
Total R^2	.16***		.09**				
n	194		201				

Note. Control variables for normal posts included time on SNS and gender. Control variables for controversial posts were not significant. ^t p<.10; *** p<.01; *** p<.001. Please note that including the items measuring perceived usefulness of "like" made no significant difference to the results.

Table 3: Regression results (differentiated controversial "liking")

	Controversial "Liking"						
	Health	-related	Ethics	s-related	Social-related		
	$R^2\Delta$	β	$R^2\Delta$	β	$R^2\Delta$	β	
Step 1	.07**		.02 t		.05*		
Control variables							
Step 2	.05*		.05 ^t		.02		
Self-monitoring		063		062		173	
Agreeableness		145*		086		011	
Affinity seeking		.052		.028		.152	
Need for gratification		.068		.195**		.185	
Age		.006		.000		.009	
Total R^2	.12*		.07**		.04		
n	198		201		200		

Note. All regression analyses included time on SNS and gender as control variables. In addition, the health-related regression included "like" function 1 (see correlation in Table 1) and the social-related regression included "like" function 3 as well. $^{t}p<.10$; *** p<.01; *** p<.01.

Keywords: impression management, self-presentation, one-click communication, personality, social media