

Advisory Board Grant Report, 2016-2017
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I was awarded an advisory board grant award for a course release for the spring 2017 semester. This course release allowed me to work on empirical research that is timely, collaborative, and will be written up for publication. This research is still ongoing. Below, I describe the purpose, what we have done, and what stage the research is in currently.

The purpose of this research is to understand the psychological reactions to what others disclose on social media sites. In simple terms, how do we react to what we see on sites like Facebook? Social media allow for communication to a diverse audience. This creates a greater risk of sharing information that may be perceived as inappropriate and/or may affect the impressions that others form of us. Practically, speaking, it matters what we share on social media. In recent years, the repercussions of self-disclosure on SNS have been marked in the media—leading to outcomes such as being fired, expelled from school, losing one’s job benefits, etc. In a recent project we examined what types of content are seen as being appropriate to share on social media (Muscanell, Ewell, & Wingate, 2016). We found that people believe it is inappropriate to share information that is too personal or revealing, and profane or sexual content. In this research, we did not examine the more nuanced factors that might be involved in our reactions on social media. This led to three lines of research, which I was able to pursue with the course release. All three lines examine reactions to social media posts in more nuanced contexts.

In the first line of research, my collaborators and I are looking at the relationship the observer has with the discloser. For example, do you feel the same way if your mom posts something politically charged vs. an acquaintance you only know from work? We are assessing this by exposing people to Facebook posts and measuring their reactions while asking them to imagine the information was shared by different types of people (close vs. non-close others). So far, we have completed pilot testing of a mass number of Facebook posts and are in the process of designing an experiment to be tested during the fall semester.

In a second project my collaborators and I are examining the consequences of observing politically or racially charged content on social media. In particular, we are assessing whether seeing posts related to the Black Lives Matter campaign and also Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, has a significant impact on observers in the areas of stress, affect, and well-being. Further, we test whether or not this differs for members of stigmatized groups vs. those who are not. Currently, we are in a second phase of data collection. In phase 1 we collected data from mainly a Latino/a sample, and in phase 2, we are recruiting African American and Caucasian American individuals. We will finish data collection and analyze results during the fall semester.

In a third line of research, my colleague and I examined impression management consequences on Facebook. Specifically, we measured people’s reactions to seeing an argument on Facebook. We were interested in whether people would have a favorable impression of an arguers, if s/he admitted s/he was wrong at the end of the argument. Our findings suggest that it is best (for your reputation) to admit your wrong on social media, especially if it is clear from the argument that you are indeed wrong. This paper is almost completed and will be submitted for publication in May, 2017.