

Logged Off: Exploring Motivational Processes Behind Deliberate Non-Use of Social Media

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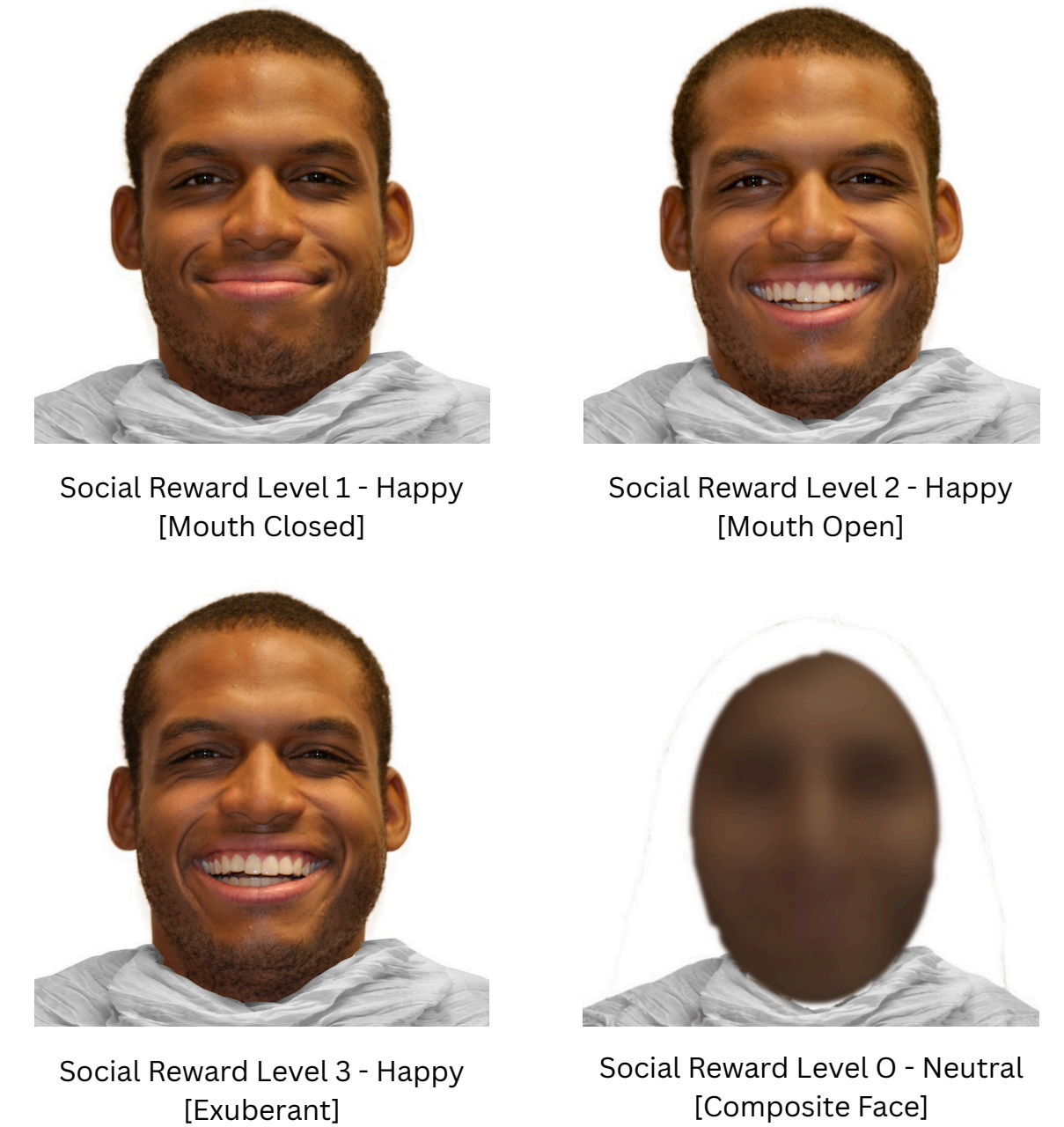


Introduction

With a growing body of concern regarding the negative effects of social media usage and the proliferation of instances of excessive usage, it is more vital now than ever to understand what drives nearly 64% of the global population (Meltwater; We Are Social, 2025) to engage with social media platforms. Previous research has shown social rewards such as 'likes' are a powerful motivator for social media use as they appeal to social needs such as the need to belong or for esteem. Social rewards therefore validate the individual's self expression and makes them feel connected to others. In this a social motivational process is born. The present study aims to compare motivational processes involving social needs fulfilment and social rewards in regular social media users and deliberate nonusers. Results may help advance understanding of psychological factors driving the increasing prevalence of social media in our day to day lives and identify targets for interventions addressing addictive use behaviours.

Methodology

Participants were categorised into regular social media user and non-user groups. The study included three main measures: **(1)** A questionnaire assessing satisfaction with different human needs (belongingness, esteem and self-actualisation) scored on Likert 1-5 (Taormina & Gao, 2013); **(2)** a questionnaire assessing individual differences in social reward scored on a 1-7 Likert scale (Foulkes et al., 2014); **(3)** an experimental measure of sensitivity to social reward derived from reaction-times in a social incentive delay task (SID; Spreckelmeyer et al., 2009) in which a cue (triangle or circle with increasing number of lines) would signal a corresponding social reward level (SRL) which was associated with a facial stimuli exhibiting greater degrees of happiness in accordance with the increasing social reward level. Data analysis was achieved by taking individual averages across the questionnaire measures and reaction time averages per individual and SRL



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Results

Descriptives Social media users had a mean use duration of 4.96 min per day (SD = 3.41) and a median checking frequency of every hour (SD = 1.91). Non-users had a mean use duration of less than 0.246 minutes and a media reply of 'I do not use social media' for checking frequency. **Questionnaire Analysis** Mann Whitney U tests conducted on the average scores from the need's satisfaction questionnaires revealed no significant differences between users and non-users for belongingness (U = 2125.500, p = 0.589, $r_b = 0.056$), esteem (U = 1960.500, p = 0.802, $r_b = -0.026$) and self-actualisation (U = 1929.500, p = 0.689, $r_b = -0.041$). The SRQ, on the other hand, revealed significant differences between the two groups whereby users demonstrated greater social reward seeking behaviours than non-users (U = 773.500, p = <.001, $r_b = -0.616$). **SID Analysis** Conducted via a 2 (group: users vs non-users; between subjects) x 4 (social reward level: 0, 1, 2, 3) mixed design ANOVA the SID task results showed the SRL x Group main effect was not significant (F (3 ϵ , 76 ϵ) = 0.907, p = 0.438) with Greenhouse-Geisser corrections applied on account of a violation of sphericity (p < .05), indicating there are no differences between users and non-users in reaction times cued by social reward levels.

Discussion

Social Needs A lack of significant differences between users and non-users on any needs satisfaction scales provides interesting insight into the utility of social media in social need fulfilment and/or the compensatory measures taken by non-users to fulfil their social needs to an equal standard.

Social Rewards Users demonstrated a higher tendency to seek social rewards than non-users which aligns nicely with prior research. However whether this tendency is what drives people to use social media or is a consequence of social media usage is not able to be determined from these results.

Social Reward Sensitivity (SID task) Non-significant results from the SID analysis when examined alongside SRQ analysis results raises the questions why users demonstrate more social reward seeking tendency but do not appear to be any more sensitive to social reward than non-users? Despite a lack of significant results this field certainly provides intrigue for future research.

Conclusion

A starting block for future research the findings presented by this study suggest that the pursuit of social rewards may be a primary motivating factor for social media engagement. Although the study finds itself limited in establishing directions of causality which also presents an issue in the face of social needs satisfaction analysis. It is likely that despite the non-significant results social needs fulfilment does have a role in motivational processes for social media engagement insofar as positive social media feedback (social rewards) stimulates and temporarily satisfies social needs such as the need to belong, thus driving individuals to use social media, but does not fulfil these needs further than a momentary feeling of satisfaction. There is definitely promise for future research investigating the interaction of social reward seeking tendencies, social need fulfilment and social reward sensitivity in users and non-users.