

Capitolo 2

Case Study 1

What kind of Facebook user are you?

Are you a regular user of Facebook? If yes, do you ever feel a little down when you haven't been able to log on or post anything for a while? In an intriguing study by Tobin, Vanman, Verreynne and Saeri (2014) [DOI: 10.1080/15534510.2014.893924], participants from Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom took part in a study on Facebook use and need satisfaction. Each of the participants were selected because they acknowledged making Facebook posts at least once per week.

After agreeing to participate, half of the participants were asked to continue using Facebook as normal for two days. The other half of participants were asked to refrain from posting anything to Facebook for two days, although they were able to log on and view others' posts. After the 48 hours, the participants were asked to complete a number of self-report measures to assess need satisfaction. These measures included an assessment of perceived belonging, self-esteem, control (over events in the participant's life), and a measure of meaningful existence (how invisible, meaningless, and unimportant the participants feel).

The results showed that participants who refrained from posting on Facebook for 48 hours felt less like they belonged and that they had a less meaningful existence. In other words, those needs were not being met. If you think about it in the other way, this study shows that Facebook use does fulfil some of our needs, and when our ability to post is thwarted, those needs are not being fully met.

How else does social media affect our lives? For more information on this topic, click on the link below to read over the results of a massive self-report study conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. The researchers contacted 2,255 adults aged 18 years or older and asked them a number of questions about their social media use (click on the "Topline Questionnaire" under "Report Materials" on the right of the page to see the actual questions). The findings shed light on the kind of people who use social media, how people use websites such as Facebook, as well as the characteristics of the average Facebook user. See how you compare to the average Facebook user. www.pewinternet.org/2011/06/16/social-networking-sites-and-our-lives/

Reference

- Tobin, S.J., Vanman, E.J., Verreynne, M. & Saeri, A.K. (2014). Threats to belonging on Facebook: Lurking and ostracism. *Social Influence*, [DOI: 10.1080/15534510.2014.893924]

Case Study 2

My hormones made me do it!: Lying on behalf of your group

The text describes a number of common physiological measures, but did you know that your physiological reactions could be manipulated as well? A lot of recent research has investigated the role of oxytocin (a neuropeptide produced by the hypothalamus which can act as both a hormone and a neurotransmitter in your body) on group bonding and affiliation. A study by Shaul Shalvi from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Carsten De Dreu from the University of Amsterdam (2014) [DOI: 10.1080/15534510.2014.893924] actually manipulated male participants' exposure to oxytocin and then examined the extent to which they would lie on behalf of their group.

Some 60 male participants took part in this study; half were exposed to a placebo and half were exposed to oxytocin, all via a self-administered nasal spray. Next, participants were told that they were going to take part in an activity in groups of three, and any money each individual earned would be shared with the group. The activity entailed accurately predicting the outcome of a coin toss. Before each coin toss, the participants were asked to guess whether the coin would land on "heads" or "tails" and they were also told whether a successful prediction would lead the group to gain money, lose money, or neither. Because the participants never wrote down their predictions, they were at liberty to lie. But in which conditions, if any, would the participants be dishonest?

The researchers showed that more frequent, and more extreme rates of lying, occurred on the gain trials and when the males had previously been exposed to oxytocin. (How did the researchers know that the participants were lying? Over a series of coin tosses, people should report making correct predictions about 50% of the time. If the prediction rate grows above 50%, then that suggests that the participants are not being entirely honest). In the gain + oxytocin exposure condition, participants claimed to predict the outcome of the coin toss almost 80% the time. This level of dishonesty was not seen in any of the other conditions.

What is it about oxytocin that increases people's dishonest behavior? Often, people feel that a lie is more justified if it is made—not on one's own behalf—but on behalf of an in-group, such as one's family or team. If oxytocin does, in fact, promote group cohesion and bonding, then it makes sense that exposure to oxytocin might motivate people to lie, especially if it benefits the group.

So, the next time you feel compelled to tell a little white lie to help your group, just sniffle a little bit and say, "The oxytocin made me do it."

Reference

- Shalvi, S. & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2014). Oxytocin promotes group-serving dishonesty. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1400724111]

Case Study 3

Demand characteristics

Aderman and Berkowitz (1970) [DOI: 10.1037/h0028770] asked 120 participants to listen to a recorded conversation between a person in need of help and a potential helper. The potential helper either did not help, helped and was thanked, or helped and was not thanked. Participants who imagined themselves being the person in need of help, or imagined being the potential helper who helped and was thanked, helped the experimenter the most, in contrast to participants who imagined themselves to be the non-helper.

Results showed that the mood of the participants mediated these effects; participants who imagined themselves being the thanked helper had pleasurable empathic experiences, while participants who imagined themselves as being the person in need experienced unpleasant empathic reactions, becoming more strongly motivated to help.

Wispe, Kiecolt, and Long (1977) [DOI: 10.2224/sbp.1977.5.2.249] replicated these mood effects on helping. However, in their second study, they demonstrated that these mood effects were only present when participants knew about the purpose of the research, and not when they were ignorant about being measured on helping behavior. This supports the demand characteristics hypothesis that the procedures used in empathy and helping studies suggest that results may be due to demand characteristics.

References

- Aderman, D., & Berkowitz, L. (1970). [DOI: 10.1037/h0028770]. Observational set, empathy, and helping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 14, 141–148.
- Wispe, L., Kiecolt, J., & Long, R. E. (1977). [DOI: 10.2224/sbp.1977.5.2.249]. Demand characteristics, moods, and helping. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 5, 249–255.

Case Study 4

The importance of replication

Replicating obtained results is very important to make sure that the results are not coincidental. When replicating the obtained results, one can use different manipulations, materials, or ways of measuring the dependent variable. This may also lead to new interesting results, which could provide more insight into the content under investigation.

An example of this is the research by Stel and Vonk (2004), in which they demonstrated that mimicry enhances empathy and bonding processes. This was shown using video materials of a young woman talking with her therapist about either a happy or a sad event. Mimicking this woman resulted in participants feeling more empathy and bonding towards the target.

In order to replicate the mimicry effects obtained with these materials, Stel and Vonk (2005a, 2005b) used a different video. They presented participants with a scene from a reality soap about which, at the time the study was running, there was some debate regarding whether the actors were being “themselves,” or were acting. Using this video material, they replicated the effects of mimicry, but only for participants who thought the main person shown on the video was being herself, while mimicry effects were different for participants who thought she was acting. After replicating this effect in another study, they concluded that effects of mimicry of facial expressions depend on whether emotional expressions are perceived as real.

References

- Stel, M., & Vonk, R. (2004). *The social consequences of facial mimicry: Effects on empathy, understanding, feelings of similarity, and liking*. Manuscript submitted for publication. Stel, M., & Vonk, R. (2005a). *Effects of facial imitation depend on whether the emotion is seen as real*. Manuscript submitted for publication. (This paper is a revised and resubmitted version of an article written for *Media Psychology*, and is also published in the Dutch conference book shown below.)
- Stel, M., & Vonk, R. (2005b). Imitation effects of real and acted emotions [Imitatie-effecten bij echte vs. geacteerde emoties]. In E. Gordijn, J. Ouwerkerk, R. Holland, & A. Meijnders (Eds), *Jaarboek Sociale Psychologie 2004*. Delft: Eburon.