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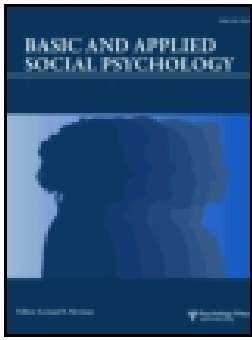
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Perceptions of Perfection: The Influence of Social Media on Interpersonal Evaluations

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ABSTRACT

Through social network sites such as Facebook, people gain information about acquaintances that they would not gain from everyday life. This information typically highlights the most positive aspects of people's personalities and lives. The goal of this investigation was to determine whether looking at another user's Facebook profile influences perceptions of that individual's socially desirable characteristics (e.g., intelligence, attractiveness). One group of participants viewed an acquaintance's Facebook profile before providing evaluations, and the other evaluated the person without viewing Facebook. Results revealed that participants who viewed another person's Facebook profile evaluated that person more favorably than those who completed a control task (Study 1) or wrote about the person from memory (Study 2). Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook have revolutionized the way people present themselves and interact with others (Weisbuch, Ivcevic, & Ambady, 2009). Through large, diffuse networks composed mostly of acquaintances rather than close friends, SNS users have a large audience for their carefully constructed personal identities (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) and social lives (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). Because SNSs are so customizable and interactive, users are exposed to a variety of rich information about distant others' lifestyles and personalities that they may not otherwise get through face-to-face interaction (Steijn & Schouten, 2013). It stands to reason that this detailed, positively biased social information may influence how SNS users perceive distant others in their social networks. However, surprisingly little research has been conducted in which perceptions of acquaintances made after viewing social media profiles are compared to perceptions retained without this SNS information. The current research attempts to fill this gap in the literature by examining the impact of social media (particularly Facebook) on participants' perceptions of real-life acquaintances.



personalities using photos, self-descriptions, and public conversations (Weisbuch et al., 2009), which other users notice and consider when viewing their profiles and evaluating them (Vogel & Rose, 2017). Moreover, users are consciously aware of these opportunities (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), report taking advantage of them (Zhao et al., 2008), and understand that other users also present themselves positively, perhaps unrealistically so (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Drouin, Miller, Wehle, & Hernandez, 2016; Manago et al., 2008). Although a wealth of prior research has found that viewing others' SNS profiles produces negative *self*-evaluations (e.g., Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011; Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Buxmann, 2013; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015; Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014), to our knowledge no studies have directly demonstrated that perceptions of others' value-laden traits (e.g., popularity, success, attractiveness) are impacted by social media exposure. Although people who use Facebook likely hope that others will view them positively based on their online personas, whether their attempts at positive self-presentation are successful is not clear.

Self-presentation on social network sites

SNSs offer unique opportunities for users to selectively present the most positive aspects of their lifestyles and

Perceptions of acquaintances on social network sites

Understanding the role of SNSs in shaping participants' perceptions of acquaintances is important for several

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reasons. First, research has shown that close others are generally viewed very positively (Taylor & Koivumaki, 1976), whereas impressions of acquaintances are more varied. Because distant relationships do not involve a great deal of meaningful interaction, SNSs likely account for a large portion of the social information a user receives about an acquaintance and likely have a pronounced impact on perceptions of that acquaintance. Second, the average SNS user reports logging in multiple times a day (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), and most users' SNS networks consist primarily of acquaintances (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Manago et al., 2012). Many users have hundreds of social contacts on SNSs, only some of whom are close others. Therefore, views of acquaintances would be expected to account for a large portion of an effect of social media on person perception. Thus far, research on social media and person perception has mostly focused on impressions of strangers, rather than acquaintances (e.g., Back et al., 2010; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Creed & Funder, 1998; Funder & Sneed, 1993; Tskhay & Rule, 2014; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008; Weidman & Levinson, 2015; Weisbuch et al., 2009). Because preexisting acquaintances are evaluated differently than strangers (Leising, Gallrein, & Dufner, 2014), and because social networks primarily consist of preexisting acquaintances, it is important to assess the impact of social media on such perceptions. Moreover, most prior research has examined personality characteristics (e.g., extraversion, conscientiousness) as opposed to subjective, value-laden characteristics (e.g., intelligence, attractiveness), which may be critical for self-presentation. The current research aims to address these gaps in the literature.

Current research

Social media offers a host of information that people would not otherwise receive about their distant acquaintances (Steijn & Schouten, 2013). This information, which tends to be positively biased (e.g., Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov, 2012), is likely to influence social media users' perceptions of their acquaintances. The aim of the present study is to examine differences in participants' perceptions of acquaintances after viewing these acquaintances' social media profiles versus simply thinking about them. Because people do not interact with their acquaintances very frequently or meaningfully, these control conditions likely simulate real-world evaluations. If people tend to selectively present their most positive characteristics and life events on social media (see Vogel & Rose, 2016, for a review), it stands to reason that acquaintances would be seen as

having more desirable characteristics when judged after viewing Facebook. In two studies, we sought to determine whether Facebook users would evaluate their acquaintances differently on socially desirable characteristics if they first viewed their acquaintances' Facebook profiles. Facebook users often present themselves positively using photos, status updates about their accomplishments, and public conversations with others (Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012; Manago et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2008), which are likely to make them appear more attractive, successful, intelligent, likeable, and popular. Because of this positive self-presentation bias on Facebook, we hypothesized that participants who viewed their acquaintances' profiles would have more positive evaluations of those targets than those who evaluated their acquaintances without using Facebook.

Study 1

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 121 undergraduates (89 female) from a large Midwestern university in the United States who participated in exchange for course credit. The median age was 19 ($M = 19.02$, $SD = 2.27$). The racial makeup of the sample was 76.9% White, 14% Black, 2.5% Asian, 1.7% Pacific Islander, 2.5% mixed race, and 2.5% unknown race(s). Given the logistics of the procedure (described next), each session of participants was randomly assigned to the Facebook condition or control condition.

Procedure and measures

Participants came to the lab in groups of one to four to take part in a larger study regarding social comparison on social media. As just noted, all participants in a given session were assigned to the same condition so that the experimenter could give identical verbal instructions throughout the study. Upon arrival, participants were seated at individual computers. They were told that the study concerned their personality characteristics and those of the people in their social networks. First, all participants completed a cognitive task as part of a larger study.¹ Next, participants in the Facebook condition were instructed to select five evaluation targets whose profiles they would like to view. They viewed each target's Facebook profile for 1 min each, spending a total of 5 min browsing Facebook. After viewing the profiles, they were instructed to log out of their Facebook accounts before completing the dependent measures. Participants in the control condition also wrote down the names of five targets. However, instead

Table 1. Descriptive statistics from Study 1.

| | Overall data | Facebook condition | Control condition |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Sample size | 121 | 64 | 57 |
| Range of evaluations | 1.80–5.00 | 3.00–5.00 | 1.80–4.76 |
| <i>M</i> of evaluations | 3.74 | 3.84 | 3.63 |
| <i>Mdn</i> of evaluations | 3.76 | 3.88 | 3.68 |
| <i>SD</i> of evaluations | .48 | .41 | .53 |
| Coefficient of variation | .13 | .11 | .15 |

Note. Participants rated five friends' attractiveness, intelligence, likability, popularity, and success on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*below average*) to 5 (*above average*). Evaluation scores reflect participants' average rating, collapsing across traits and friends.

of viewing Facebook, they spent 5 min doing a filler task on the Internet that involved tracing routes on a map. After 5 min, they were instructed to close the Internet browser. All participants then completed the same dependent measures. Participants rated each target's attractiveness, intelligence, likability, popularity, and success on 5-point Likert-type scales from 1 (*below average*) to 5 (*above average*), yielding 25 trait ratings (five for each target). Ratings were collapsed across traits and targets for analysis purposes ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .48$; $\alpha = .87$).

Results and discussion

As expected, participants in the Facebook condition, who viewed targets' profiles before evaluating them, evaluated these targets more favorably ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .41$) than participants in the control condition, who evaluated targets without viewing their profiles ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .53$).²

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and plotted in Figure 1. Specifically, on average, participants who viewed Facebook profiles evaluated the targets .44 standard deviation units more positively than those who did not ($d = .44$). Furthermore, 65.23% of participants in this sample who viewed Facebook profiles evaluated targets more positively than the average participant who did not view Facebook (descriptive $U_3 = 65.23\%$). In the general population (assuming evaluation scores are normally distributed), 67% of those who viewed Facebook would evaluate targets more positively than the average person who did not view Facebook (Cohen's $U_3 = 67\%$; Valentine, Aloe, & Lau, 2015). This pattern of results was consistent across both male and female participants based on the very small effect size for the participant Gender \times Experimental Condition interaction (partial $\eta^2 = .007$). Overall, the results corroborate previous findings of a self-presentation bias on Facebook such that users present the most positive aspects of their personalities and lives (e.g., Chou & Edge, 2012; Manago et al., 2008; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Qiu et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2008). Furthermore, our results provide the first direct, experimental evidence that positive self-presentation on Facebook affects how observers perceive their acquaintances compared to non-Facebook conditions.

Study 2

Although the results supported our hypothesis, Study 1 had several limitations. First, there were potentially

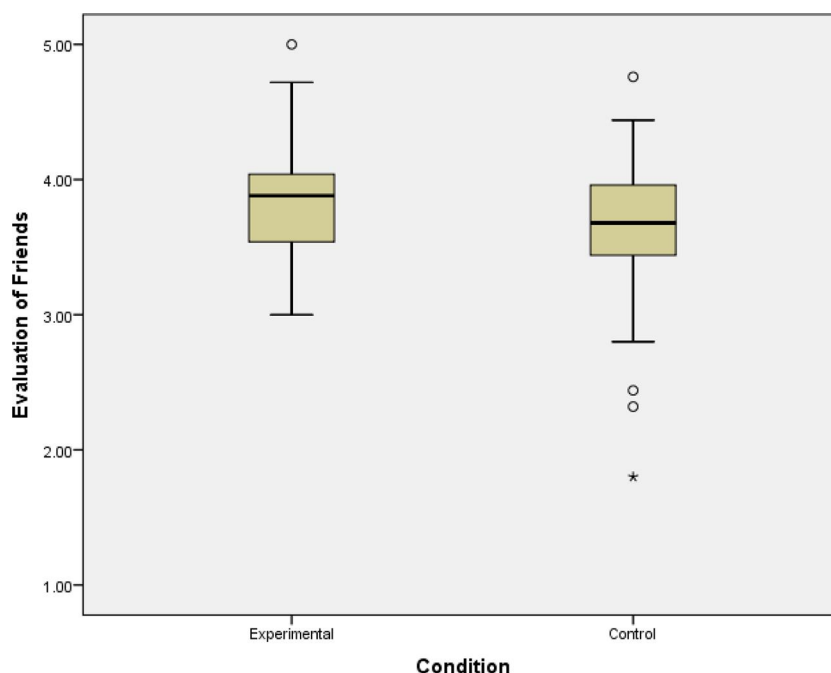


Figure 1. Boxplot display of mean evaluations of targets' traits in Study 1, organized by experimental condition.

important differences between conditions in the amount of information participants used about the targets and the depth at which they processed the information before making judgments. For example, participants in the Facebook condition were given time to view targets' profiles before making their evaluations, whereas participants in the control condition were not actively thinking about the targets until they began their evaluations. Therefore, we cannot rule out the explanation that these differences, rather than differences related to the nature of SNS content itself, account for the results. In Study 2, we addressed this limitation by redesigning the control condition such that participants wrote about the target person before completing evaluations.

Second, participants in Study 1 were instructed to choose any five targets to evaluate. The only restriction was that the targets must have Facebook profiles. Because social networks primarily consist of acquaintances rather than close friends, we presumed that participants would primarily choose acquaintances to evaluate. However, some participants chose close friends or family members to evaluate. This is potentially problematic for two reasons. First, these evaluation targets are less likely to be representative of SNS use, given that much of SNS use consists of browsing acquaintances' profiles (Pempek et al., 2009). When asked to choose someone to evaluate, participants likely chose the first individuals who came to mind, rather than those who would be representative of their SNS use. Second, the extant literature indicates that Facebook users are most affected by others' self-presentation when they do not know their Facebook friends in real life (Chou & Edge, 2012). This finding suggests that impressions of acquaintances may be more malleable than impressions of close others after using Facebook. Indeed, research on self-disclosure has found that individuals' social media activity more strongly affects their relationships with acquaintances than with close others (Steijn & Schouten, 2013). Therefore, in Study 2, we specifically instructed participants to select an acquaintance using the following instructions: "Think of a friend who you know fairly well but would not consider a close friend or best friend." Important to note, close others are generally evaluated much more positively than acquaintances or even oneself (Taylor & Koivumaki, 1976). Although we would not expect acquaintances to be viewed more positively than close friends, the results of Study 1 suggest that they would be evaluated more positively by participants who viewed their Facebook profiles than those who did not. Moreover, because of the possible effects of relationship closeness on evaluations, we also included two

additional sets of measures to ensure that participants across conditions chose friends who were similar on relationship dimensions (e.g., closeness, relationship satisfaction).

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 104 undergraduates (81 female) from the same university as Study 1 who participated in exchange for course credit. Three participants were excluded from analyses for not following instructions, and two were removed due to experimenter error, yielding a final sample of 99 participants (78 female). The median age was 19 ($M = 19.32$, $SD = 2.53$). The racial makeup of the sample was 59.6% White, 22.2% Black, 7% Asian, 10.1% mixed race, and 1% unknown race(s); 1% declined to respond. As in Study 1, each session of participants was randomly assigned to either the Facebook condition or the control condition.

Procedure and measures

Participants came to the lab for a study purportedly concerning the relationship between their personality characteristics and those of the people in their social networks. All participants were asked to think of a person they knew fairly well but would not consider a close friend or a best friend.³ Participants in the Facebook condition viewed the target person's profile for 3 min and were instructed to pay attention to information such as the target's appearance, interests, and typical Facebook posts. To closely simulate the information that people might typically receive on Facebook, participants in the control condition completed a brief questionnaire about the target that included information about the target's appearance, interests, and typical conversation topics (see the appendix). Finally, all participants completed the following measures using MediaLab software (Jarvis, 2008).

Evaluations of target's characteristics. As in Study 1, participants answered five questions to evaluate the target's attractiveness (1 = *very unattractive*, 5 = *very attractive*), intelligence (1 = *not at all intelligent*, 5 = *very intelligent*), likability (1 = *not at all likeable*, 5 = *very likeable*), popularity (1 = *very unpopular*, 5 = *very popular*), and success (1 = *very unsuccessful*, 5 = *very successful*) on 1-to-5 Likert-type scales.⁴ Items were combined for analysis purposes ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .58$; $\alpha = .65$).⁵

Evaluations of relationship with target. Participants also answered eight questions about the person's

positive qualities and their intentions to spend time with the person. Sample items include “How good of a friend is this person?” (1 = *not a good friend at all*, 5 = *very good friend*), “How fun is this person to be around?” (1 = *not fun at all*, 5 = *very fun*), “How close do you feel to this person?” (1 = *very distant*, 5 = *very close*), and “Do you plan to invite this person to spend time with you soon?” (1 = *definitely will not*, 5 = *definitely will*). Items were combined for analysis purposes ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .74$; $\alpha = .90$).

McGill friendship questionnaire–respondent’s affection.

To assess participants’ feelings about their relationship with the person, they completed the 16-item McGill Friendship Questionnaire–Respondent’s Affection (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999) using a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale. Sample items include “I am satisfied with my friendship with [friend’s name],” “I think my friendship with [friend’s name] is strong,” and “I hope [friend’s name] and I will stay friends” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $M = 3.72$, $SD = .67$; $\alpha = .96$). See Table 2 for correlations between measures.

Results and discussion

Relationship evaluations

First, we examined potential differences between the Facebook and control conditions on attitudes toward the relationship and intentions to spend time with the target person. Participants in the Facebook condition ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .72$) and participants in the control condition ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .76$) had similar attitudes and intentions ($d = .18$). Similarly, scores on the McGill Friendship Questionnaire were similar between the Facebook condition ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .65$) and the control condition ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .69$; $d = .13$). This result suggests that target selection cannot account for the differences across conditions.

Friend evaluations

Replicating the results of Study 1, participants in the Facebook condition rated targets more favorably ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .56$) than did participants in the control condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .59$). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3 and plotted in Figure 2. Similar to Study 1, participants who viewed a target’s Facebook profile in this study evaluated the

target .37 standard deviation units more positively on average than those who did not view Facebook ($d = .37$). In addition, 70.83% of participants who viewed a friend’s Facebook profile evaluated their friend more positively than the average control participant (descriptive $U_3 = 70.83$, Cohen’s $U_3 = 64.43$). Again, a small effect size for the Participant Gender \times Experimental Condition interaction suggests that male and female participants’ evaluations did not substantially differ based on experimental condition (partial η^2 for interaction = .001), and 90% of participants reported choosing an evaluation target of the same gender as themselves. Taken together, these results provide further support for the hypothesis that viewing an acquaintance’s Facebook profile leads to more positive evaluations of the acquaintance.

General discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the influence of Facebook on the evaluation of acquaintances’ socially desirable traits. In two studies, participants were randomly assigned to either view their acquaintances’ Facebook profiles or complete a control task and then to evaluate their acquaintances’ value-laden characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, intelligence). Results showed that participants evaluated these individuals more favorably if they first viewed the targets’ Facebook profiles (vs. simply thinking or writing about the targets), with comparable medium effect sizes across the two studies.

To our knowledge, these studies are the first to offer experimental evidence that positive self-presentation bias on Facebook affects views of acquaintances when compared to non-Facebook control conditions. Much of the social media literature employs a cross-sectional approach using mediation analysis, which does not necessarily yield accurate causal inferences (Grice, Cohn, Ramsey, & Chaney, 2015; Kline, 2015; Tate, 2015; Thoemmes, 2015; Trafimow, 2015). Manipulating participants’ Facebook activity allowed us to infer causality. Moreover, these results fit well into the context of prior research showing that people experience envy while using Facebook (e.g., Krasnova et al., 2013; Tandoc et al., 2015) because their acquaintances’ profiles lead to them to view their acquaintances more positively than they would offline (e.g., Chou & Edge, 2012; Manago et al., 2008; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Qiu et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2008). Because the majority of online social networks are composed of acquaintances rather than close friends (Manago et al., 2012), Facebook users’ opinions of many of their daily contacts may be largely shaped by the impressions they make on Facebook. Although first impressions made on

Table 2. Correlations between variables in Study 2.

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------------|---|-----|-----|
| 1. Friend characteristics | — | .53 | .44 |
| 2. Relationship with friend | — | — | .84 |
| 3. Friendship questionnaire | — | — | — |

Table 3. Descriptive statistics from Study 2.

| | Overall data | Facebook condition | Control condition |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Sample size | 99 | 48 | 51 |
| Range of evaluations | 2.20–5.00 | 2.40–5.00 | 2.20–5.00 |
| <i>M</i> of evaluations | 3.82 | 3.93 | 3.72 |
| <i>Mdn</i> of evaluations | 4.00 | 4.00 | 3.80 |
| <i>SD</i> of evaluations | .58 | .56 | .59 |
| Coefficient of variation | .15 | .14 | .16 |

Note. Participants rated their friend's attractiveness, intelligence, likability, popularity, and success on 1-to-5 Likert-type scales (e.g., 1 = *very unattractive*, 5 = *very attractive*). Evaluation scores reflect participants' average rating, collapsing across traits.

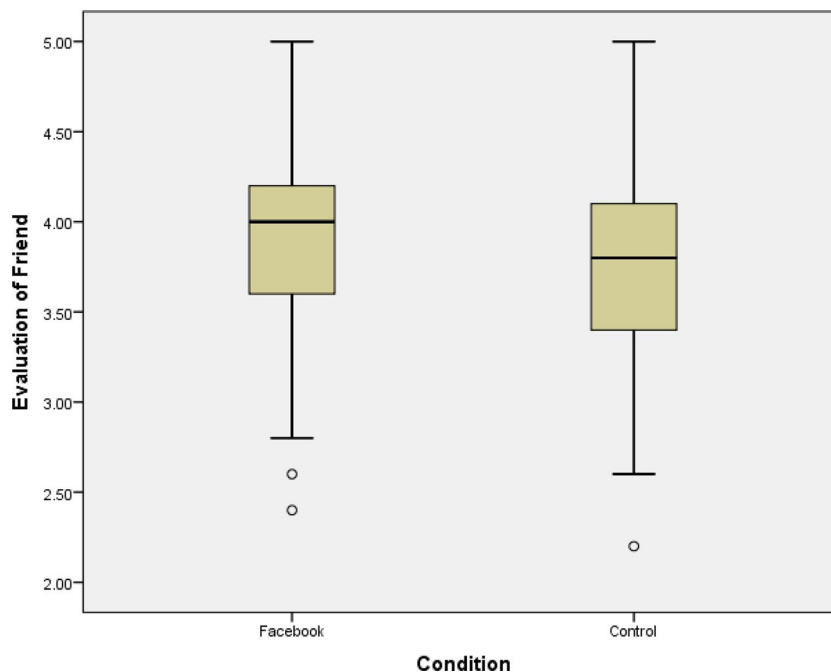
Facebook have been found to be similar to those made offline (Back et al., 2010; Weisbuch et al., 2009), our studies suggest that impressions of existing acquaintances are, in fact, influenced by self-presentation on Facebook. Through exposure to others' personal "highlight reels" (e.g., flawless photos, posts about positive accomplishments and experiences), people tend to judge others' socially desirable characteristics (e.g., successfulness, popularity, attractiveness, intelligence) quite positively. Therefore, Facebook users base their judgments on accurate but incomplete snapshots of other users' lives. Although a user may be aware of such incompleteness (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Manago et al., 2008), these results suggest that it still influences person perception.

Limitations and future directions

These studies have a few notable limitations. First, Facebook use in the lab is not identical to participants'

typical Facebook use. Although passive browsing of others' posts is one of the major activities of Facebook (Pempek et al., 2009), participants may view others' profiles for longer periods, or view posts on their newsfeed rather than individuals' profiles. We used a lab-based, experimental approach in order to establish causality; however, a replication based on participants' natural Facebook use would be informative.

Second, participants in the control condition generated their own description of the target person, whereas those in the Facebook condition viewed preexisting information (i.e., the target person's profile). We chose this procedure because it accurately reflects much of what happens in daily life, especially when evaluating acquaintances rather than close friends. To evaluate a person who is not present, the perceiver relies on his or her memory of the person's behavior and characteristics to form an impression. However, we cannot rule out that answering questions about a target person influenced perceptions of the target in unintended ways. Relatedly, it is possible that participants may have evaluated their social contacts positively partly because they were exposed to information about those contacts immediately before the evaluation (i.e., recency effects; see related ideas in de Bruin, 2005). However, because participants in the control condition of Study 2 also had information (albeit self-generated) about their social contacts, this is unlikely to account for the entirety of the effect. Furthermore, recency effects have been found to be small and sometimes nonsignificant (Anderson & Barrios, 1961; Asch, 1946). Nonetheless,

**Figure 2.** Boxplot display of mean evaluations of targets' traits in Study 2, organized by experimental condition.

participants may have paid particular attention to the positive information contained in the profiles because they viewed it immediately before evaluating their friends.

Third, although theory and the empirical literature suggest that a positive self-presentation bias likely accounts for the differences between conditions, we did not confirm this by evaluating the actual content of the profiles. Although we suggest that participants' responses themselves support this notion, future research could seek to measure the positivity of the actual profile content.

Theoretical and practical implications

These results have important theoretical and practical implications for person perception on SNSs. First, from a theoretical standpoint, these results suggest that perceptions of acquaintances' subjective, value-laden traits may be influenced by self-presentation biases. Because subjective, value-laden traits are socially desirable and highly amenable to social comparison, perception of such traits is likely driving the effects observed in the literature involving social comparison and social media (e.g., Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011; Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014; Vogel et al., 2014). Although previous research has examined the effects of viewing acquaintances' SNS profiles on self-views (Chou & Edge, 2012) and relationship development (Steijn & Schouten, 2013), the present research is the first to directly compare perceptions of acquaintances' value-laden traits with and without exposure to SNSs. Second, this research supports the notion that viewing acquaintances' profiles is particularly impactful (e.g., Chou & Edge, 2012; Steijn & Schouten, 2013). Although the present research did not directly compare perceptions of acquaintances with perceptions of friends, data from our lab tentatively suggest that perceptions of close friends are less strongly influenced by SNS exposure (Vogel & Rose, 2017). This is likely due both to a general tendency to evaluate close others very positively (Taylor & Koivumaki, 1976) and to knowledge of close friends' flaws and difficulties that may not be apparent on SNSs (Chou & Edge, 2012). Regardless, it is important to note that perceptions of acquaintances are more likely to be impacted by SNS exposure than perceptions of close friends or family members.

From an applied perspective, these two studies suggest that the ubiquity of Facebook may lead to a strong overall effect on how people perceive others. Although the effect sizes observed in this study were only in the medium range (passing the benchmark for educational significance, but not clinical significance; Wolf, 1986),

they may be cumulative over time. Indeed, Facebook offers the opportunity to gain detailed information about hundreds of acquaintances. Users who do not know their Facebook friends well in real life rely on information gleaned from Facebook to form impressions of those acquaintances (Chou & Edge, 2012). Viewing overly positive depictions of hundreds of acquaintances may alter people's perceptions of where they stand in relation to others. Important to note, participants in these studies had very brief exposure to only one to five acquaintances' profiles before evaluating those acquaintances, and differences between the Facebook and control conditions were still notable. These short-term effects would likely pale in comparison to the potential cumulative effects that would happen over time. Furthermore, self-presentation bias can affect Facebook users positively when they use it to their advantage. Positive self-presentation is one of the major goals of Facebook use (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012), and our results suggest that users typically accomplish this goal. Facebook can be an excellent platform for projecting a positive image of oneself to a large number of friends and acquaintances.

Conclusion

In sum, the results of these two studies demonstrate an effect of Facebook use on the perception of acquaintances' highly desirable traits. Because social media use is ubiquitous in daily life, impressions made on SNSs may strongly influence ongoing perceptions of acquaintances. Viewing others' profiles may be beneficial for impression management and relationship maintenance.

Notes

1. Participants in both conditions completed the Remote Associates Test before choosing friends to evaluate as part of a larger study on social comparison and social media. All participants were told that the test was a predictor of future success. They also evaluated themselves on the same characteristics (attractiveness, intelligence, likability, popularity, and success) as their friends. These manipulations and measures are not central to the core components of the present article and are not discussed further.
2. One evaluation score (1.80) was more than 3 standard deviations below the mean. When the outlier was excluded from analyses, the pattern of results remained consistent, with a slightly reduced effect size ($d = .39$). Because the outlier is a realistic and meaningful data point, it was retained in the final analysis.
3. It is possible that some participants evaluated targets whom they met on social media and have never met in real life. In Study 1, participants were asked, "When was the

last time you saw this person?” Of the 605 targets that participants evaluated in this study, only three were people they had not met in person (0.05%). In Study 2, participants were asked, “How did you meet this person?” Only two participants indicated that they met the person online (1%). Because the vast majority of evaluation targets were individuals whom participants knew offline, this issue most likely did not influence the observed pattern of results. Analyses were conducted excluding online-only targets for both studies, and the pattern and strength of the results did not change.

4. It is important to note that the anchors of the measurement scales differed across Studies 1 and 2. Specifically, Study 1 used comparative judgments (*below average* to *above average*), and Study 2 used absolute judgments (*not at all* to *very*). Although using consistent anchors would have been ideal, there is a large literature showing that absolute and comparative judgments are highly conflated (see Chambers & Windschitl, 2004, for a review). The extant literature and the consistent effect sizes across the two studies suggest that the change in scale anchors and judgment types did not have an impact on results.
5. Although Studies 1 and 2 assessed the same five traits, Cronbach’s alpha was notably lower in Study 2. This may have been caused by the relatively small number of items (five) included in Study 2 (Peterson, 1994). A 2 (experimental condition) \times 5 (trait) mixed-model analysis of variance showed a very small Condition \times Trait interaction (partial $\eta^2 = .008$), indicating that the influence of trait type did not substantially differ based on experimental condition. Furthermore, a principal components analysis did not support extraction of multiple factors. Therefore, we opted to combine the traits into one evaluation score.

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Appendix

Friend questionnaire for control condition participants (Study 2)

1. What is this friend's first name?

2. How did you meet this friend?

3. Friend's gender: _____
4. Friend's age: _____
5. Friend's appearance (such as hair style, body type, clothing choices, etc.):

6. What are this friend's interests (hobbies, sports and other activities, favorite TV shows, etc.)?

7. Where does this friend work and/or go to school?

8. What kinds of things does this friend usually talk about?

