

Snapchat vs. Instagram: Social Network Sites and Self-Disclosure Differences Before and After Use

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Every year, the number of social media users grows and so too does the use of different platforms. Scholarship continues to examine the impacts these platforms have on users' behaviors and thought processes. This study examined the impacts social media usage has on one's self-disclosure behaviors after using different platforms. As much scholarship has focused on Facebook and Twitter, this study attempted to bridge the gap in knowledge by examining the impacts of Instagram versus Snapchat, two platforms with different types of

networks. Utilizing an experiment, participants were asked to interact with their respective social media platforms. Results showed that when using a more closed-network like Snapchat, users became more intentional in their sharing behaviors, whereas when using an open-network like Instagram, users became less likely to disclose information. Implications for theory and society are discussed.

Keywords: SNS, Self-Disclosure, Snapchat, Instagram

As social network sites (SNSs) have become more central to everyday life, millions of people routinely disclose their personal information on their SNSs to establish and maintain their social relationships. From profound private feelings to trivial details of day-to-day life, a variety of self-disclosures have been shared across multiple and diverse SNS platforms (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). Given that revealing personal information to others is a mainstay of developing interpersonal relationships, several studies have investigated the relationship between SNS use and users' self-disclosure, such as motivations of SNS self-disclosure and the role of self-disclosure in SNS communications (e.g., Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Choi & Bazarova, 2014; Ledbetter et al., 2011; Ouiridi et al., 2015). For example, Utz (2015) suggests that positive

and entertaining self-disclosure on Facebook can increase a user's feeling of connectedness, and Kim and Lee (2011) found that positive self-presentation on Facebook can enhance users' subjective well-being.

Recently, mobile-based SNSs have gained more and more popularity among young users. Due to the development of mobile technology, people can access their SNSs almost anytime and anywhere. According to Pew (2018), Snapchat and Instagram became the most heavily used SNS platforms among younger Americans (ages 18 to 24). Since users can upload their selfies and reveal their personal feelings immediately through their mobile devices, research on mobile SNS can provide a better understanding of the role and effect of SNSs on individuals' social relations and quality of their lives (Chen & Li, 2017).

Consistent with the current trend of SNS research exploring distinctive features of specific SNS platforms (e.g., Lemay, Doleck, & Bazelais, 2017; Piwek & Joinson, 2016), this research examined how two different SNS platforms (Snapchat and Instagram) might impact individuals' self-disclosure. Unlike most SNS research, which relies mostly on self-reported data collected by surveys, focus groups or interviews, this study conducted a laboratory experiment. The present study attempted to overcome the limitation of self-reported data and provides improved insights to understand the association between SNS platforms and users' self-disclosure, both before and after using these platforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Snapchat and Instagram

Snapchat is an SNS that is based in sharing photos and shorter videos. A "snap" refers to the fact that many of these images or photos only last for a short amount of time before disappearing or being deleted automatically by the system (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Snapchat is more of a close-ended network, as it allows people to send content more privately to a selected network of friends or acquaintances (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Snaps can only be saved by others if a friend screenshots it, but users are notified when this happens (Bayer et al., 2016). Users can modify snaps by adding captions, doodles, filters, or location-based tags to their photos and videos (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; "Create Your Own," n.d.; Piwek & Joinson, 2016). In 2016, Snapchat integrated Bitmojis, customizable avatars, into its service (Ong, 2018). Snapchat's visual modality affords self-expression

while its ephemerality encourages informal, casual communication with friends (Waddell, 2016).

Instagram is also a photo-based SNS, and it too allows the sharing of short-form videos. It also has the ability to personalize these images and videos via filters, text and the editing of images. Unlike Snapchat, Instagram has more integration with other platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, allowing the user to reach broader and more public networks (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). In 2016, Instagram added “Stories,” a space for users to add images or video that, like certain kinds of snaps, disappear after 24 hours. Because of Instagram’s more open network and multi-platform modality, researchers have found that the platform can create more parasocial relationships, since one’s posts are also often performative to larger networks of people, theoretically even including strangers if one’s account or posts are not private (Lee et al., 2015). Research has shown that because of this, coupled with its image-based roots, the platform acts as an empowering medium for self-presentation (Lee et al., 2015). Alhabash and Ma (2017) found that desire for self-expression was a significant motivator for both Snapchat and Instagram.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is one tactic of self-impression management, and it is defined as “act of revealing personal information to others” (Archer, 1980, p. 183). In in-person communications, self-disclosure plays an important role to develop personal relationships (Derlega et al., 1987). According to Levinger and Snoek (1972), as personal relationships develop, the level of self-disclosure becomes deeper and wider. The more the relationships develop, details shared become more personal and private, as individuals have been shown to report more authentic versions of themselves to others (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006). In addition, prior research suggests that self-disclosure correlates with trust, affinity, and intimacy in interpersonal relations (Collins & Miller, 1994; Larzelere & Huston, 1980). In other words, self-disclosure not only helps to reduce the uncertainty between communication counterparts, but it also builds a level of intimacy by disclosing a shared amount of information between parties (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

This effect of intimate self-disclosure on relationship development has also been observed in computer-mediated communication (CMC; Jiang, Bazarova, Hancock, 2011).

However, the pattern of self-disclosure within in-personal communication environments can be different from those within CMC environments. In other words, communications on SNSs are a form of one-to-many type of communication, otherwise called “masspersonal communication” (O’Sullivan, 2005; Utz, 2015). Once users upload their posts on SNSs, the posts, by default, become visible to all friends on the SNS, and some platforms and options even allow the information to be shared to non-friends and/or the general public (Utz, 2015). Therefore, unlike in-person communications, there is a possibility that one’s information can be used and scrutinized by unknown third parties (Chen & Marcus, 2012). According to Christofides et al. (2009), SNS users worry about their privacy and pay attention to how they are represented on their SNSs. Utz and Krämer (2009) find that the majority of SNS users set their profiles to be seen only by friends, and individuals tend to post their positive experiences, such as accomplishments, on their SNSs, as compared to more private and intimate topics (e.g., feelings; Utz, 2011).

In this vein, some studies have been conducted to investigate how these privacy concerns influence individuals’ self-disclosure on SNSs. This becomes more complicated as individuals use multiple SNS platforms, requiring the literature to examine how these effects may vary on different platforms. For example, different functions on Twitter versus Facebook can influence users’ self-disclosure (e.g., the retweet function on Twitter can disseminate information to outside audiences, whereas Facebook functions tend to limit the audience to owners’ approved friends). Because of this, Choi and Bazarova (2014) showed that individuals self-disclose more intimate posts on Facebook compared to Twitter. Relatedly, Utz, Muscanell, and Khalid (2015) suggest that since Snapchat users can send more intimate messages or snaps to other users through its unique ‘conversation-like mode’ of communication (Piwek & Joinson, 2016), communications in Snapchat can elicit more jealousy than those in Facebook. While these are just a few examples, comparative studies of different platforms remain limited, hence the research goals of the present study.

Based on these previous findings, it can be expected that distinctive features of Snapchat and Instagram can impact users’ self-disclosure. More specifically, distinctive features of Snapchat (e.g., ephemeral messages and tightly-knitted networks) can remind users of offline or more private conversations that may occur elsewhere in daily life. This

unique communication function of Snapchat may lead its users to disclose more about themselves. By contrast, Instagram is a more open type of SNS. The main motivation for using Instagram is social interaction, and users of Instagram are less likely to hesitate to interact with people who they otherwise generally do not know in their day-to-day life (Lee et al., 2015; Pittman & Reich, 2016). Therefore, Instagram users may pay considerable attention to how they are presented to other users in the SNS. In effect, Instagram users sometimes manipulate and edit their photos through various filters to portray more positive aspects of themselves. That means, self-disclosure in Instagram may be less authentic and manipulated in more of a positive way, as compared to self-disclosure in Snapchat. While the literature in this area is still developing, this creates an initial hypothesis that:

H1: Individuals will disclose more information, be more intentional, and share more honest information through Snapchat versus Instagram.

Previous research suggests that SNS and users' self-concept have a reciprocal relationship. For example, Kim and his colleagues (2017) empirically showed that users' self-concept not only impacts their use of SNS, but also that their SNS use can influence their self-concept. More specifically, individuals with low self-monitoring prefer using Pinterest to Instagram. Also, after using Pinterest, their self-monitoring level decreases, as compared to before using it. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that using Snapchat can enhance users' self-disclosure. However, using Instagram may reduce users' self-disclosure, based on the varied realities of their networks. While people are using Instagram, they may be more likely to be sharing with a network composed of weaker social ties (e.g. people they do not know offline). These weak social ties may increase users' desires to manipulate themselves to be presented in a more positive way. Thus, self-disclosure on Instagram may become less intentional, informative, and honest. Therefore, because of the differences of these platforms and the reach of their networks, the following hypotheses are asserted:

H2a: After using Snapchat, individuals will disclose more information, be more intentional, and share more honest information compared to before using Snapchat.

H2b: After using Instagram, individuals will disclose less information, be less intentional, and share less honest information compared to before using Instagram.

METHODS

To examine these hypotheses, two studies were conducted. Following IRB approval, Study 1 was an online survey that investigated the relationship between users' self-disclosure and two different SNS platforms (Snapchat and Instagram). Study 2 was a laboratory experiment exploring how the two SNSs influence users' self-disclosure. In Study 2, participants' pre- and post-self-disclosure – before using the SNS vs. after using the SNS – were compared.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 125 undergraduate students were recruited from a major southeastern university in the U.S. Participants were given research credits as compensation for their participation. About 82% of participants were female (17% male and 1% other or non-binary) and their ages ranged from 19 to 22 years ($M_{age} = 20.07$, $SD_{age} = 1.19$). The majority of the participants were Caucasians (84%, $n = 105$), followed by Asian (4.8%, $n = 6$), African Americans (4.0%, $n = 5$), Hispanics (3.2%, $n = 4$), and others (4.0%, $n = 5$). Once participants agreed on the consent form, they were randomly assigned one of two SNS conditions ($n_{Snapchat} = 57$ vs. $n_{Instagram} = 68$). Within the SNS condition, participants were provided several questions relating to either their Snapchat or Instagram uses, such as the number of friends in their SNS and the amount of time they used the SNS. The questions asked users to recall how they utilized the specific SNS in their daily life. From these questions, participants' personality of self-disclosure was measured by applying the modified scale that adapted the original scale developed by Wheelless and Grotz (1976, 1977). The scale was composed of three aspects of self-disclosure, including intent, amount and honest. More specifically, self-disclosure intent was measured by employing three items (e.g., "When I express my personal feelings in person, I am always aware of what I am doing and saying"; $\alpha = .73$). Amount of self-disclosure was measured using four items (e.g., "I do not often talk about myself", reversed items; $\alpha = .79$). Honesty of self-disclosure was measured through three items (e.g., "I do not always feel completely sincere when I reveal my own feelings, emotions, behaviors, or experiences"; $\alpha = .72$). At the end of this

survey, participants were informed that there would be a second study and asked whether they would like to participate in the study for additional research credits. This online survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Study 2 was conducted about two weeks following completion of Study 1. Students who agreed to participate in Study 2 during the first study received an invitation email to participate. Since Study 2 was a laboratory experiment, participants needed to visit the computer lab at their assigned time. A total of 74 undergraduate students participated in study 1 (84% female, 15% male, 1% other or non-binary; $M_{age} = 20$, $SD_{age} = .80$). When they arrived, they were asked to review the consent form, and once they agreed to participate in the experiment, they were randomly assigned one of two SNS conditions ($n_{\text{Snapchat}} = 39$ vs. $n_{\text{Instagram}} = 35$). After brief oral instruction, their SNS usage patterns (Snapchat or Instagram) were measured; then they were requested to log into either their Snapchat or Instagram account, based on their condition. They then used the SNS for about 20 minutes. They were asked to use their Snapchat or Instagram in a manner consistent with their everyday use, be it sending or viewing snaps or posting or viewing photos. At the conclusion of their 20-minute usage, their self-disclosure was measured again using the same scale employed in Study 1. To investigate the impact of SNS use, each participant's pre-report of self-disclosure from Study 1 was compared to their post-report of self-disclosure following their use of a SNS platform in Study 2.

RESULTS

H1, which posited that individuals would disclose more information, be more intentional and share more honest information on Snapchat than Instagram, was supported in part and rejected in part. As shown in Table I, after comparing mean scores between groups using independent sample t-tests, individuals were more intentional in their sharing habits on Snapchat, as compared to Instagram. But there were no statistically significant differences on the platforms when considering the amount or the honesty of the self-disclosure being shared.

Table 1

Snapchat vs. Instagram: Sharing behaviors relating to intent, amount and honesty

<u>Self-Disclosure Category</u>	<u>Snapchat (n=57)(SD)</u>	<u>Instagram (n=68)(SD)</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
<i>Intention</i>	5.1345 (.75)	4.8039 (1.04)	.047
<i>Amount</i>	4.2544 (1.04)	4.1949 (1.19)	.768
<i>Honesty</i>	5.0526 (.89)	5.0245 (1.09)	.877

H2a and H2b examined user self-disclosure after participants used the social media platforms for 20 minutes. H2a, which posited that after using Snapchat, individuals would disclose more information, be more intentional, and share more honest information, as compared to before using the platform, was supported in part and rejected in part. As shown in Table II, after usage results were compared to pre-usage results using paired sample t-tests. Snapchat users did show more intention after using the platform, as compared to before. But, there were no differences in their amount of self-disclosure or their level of honesty.

Similarly, H2b, which posited that after using Instagram, individuals would disclose less information, be less intentional, and share less honest information, as compared to before using the platform, was supported in part and rejected in part. As shown in Table II, after usage results were compared to pre-usage results using paired sample t-tests. Instagram users did share less information and were less honest in the information they shared. While there was a significant difference in their intentions before and after using the platforms, they became more intentional after using Instagram, not less.

Table 2

Before and after using platforms: Sharing behaviors relating to intent, amount and honesty

<u>Snapchat (n=39)</u>	<u>Mean (SD)</u>	<u>2-tailed Sig.</u>
<i>Intention</i> Before use	4.95 (.84)	.013
After use	5.38 (.69)	
<i>Amount</i> Before use	4.28 (1.12)	.228
After use	4.09 (1.11)	
<i>Honesty</i> Before use	5.06 (.96)	.823
After use	5.09 (.92)	
<u>Instagram(n=35)</u>		
<i>Intention</i> Before use	4.92 (1.04)	.036
After use	5.18 (.92)	
<i>Amount</i> Before use	4.10 (1.23)	.009
After use	3.74 (1.24)	
<i>Honesty</i> Before use	5.07 (1.15)	.019
After use	4.81 (1.22)	

DISCUSSION

These findings have multiple implications, both theoretically and professionally.

First, based on previous literature, this study developed hypotheses that generally tried to differentiate Instagram and Snapchat, initially predicting that Snap users' behavior may be more intentional, honest and occurring at higher rates because of the platform tends have users interact with more of a private, closed-network group of friends. Conversely, expectations were that Instagram's more public-facing network would mean that users might limit their self-disclosure activity, as well as their levels of self-disclosure intention and honesty. In some ways, this was supported. In others, it was not. But these mixed results offer interesting theoretical developments for the literature.

In this project's first study, Snapchat users were differentiated from Instagram users. It was found that, in a more private and closed-network setting, Snapchat users did self-report that they were more intentional in their posts. This would imply users may be more intentional in their behavior on some platforms versus others, especially when they are communicating with a more private group of friends. And yet, regardless of platform, users self-reported similar results in regards to the variables of amount shared and self-disclosure honesty. These results arguably support the notion that many modern SNS users have shared personality traits, regardless of platform. Further, while users do report

using different social media platforms in slightly different ways, these differences are not set in stone. This means that, as different as some of these platforms are, users may also carry their personal traits onto multiple platforms, regardless of differences in the functionality of, and/or the public or private nature of their networks on, these platforms. Notably, this is at least in terms of how users *self-report* their own behavior.

With these results in mind, the second part of this study, which used an experiment to see how actual usage of a platform may change users' self-disclosure tendencies, becomes more telling. After using Snapchat, users' behavior did change, as they became more intentional in their self-disclosure. After using Instagram, users' behavior also changed, as they disclosed less information and became less honest in their disclosures. Further, like Snapchat, they became more intentional in their posts after using the platform.

The findings imply that, regardless of platform, users do become much more intentional in their thought process after spending time on SNS platforms. This means that users may be thinking much more critically about what they're posting, regardless of whether it's a more private network of friends or more of a public performance in front of what may include many strangers. Additionally, the more public nature of Instagram may cause more of a change to a user's behavior, as compared to what they do on a more private and in-network platform like Snapchat. Finally, post-usage results do reinforce findings that it's crucial to consider different social media platforms in different ways, as mean scores of self-disclosure after using the platforms were higher for Snapchat than Instagram in every category. Thus, while using a more public network like Instagram may cause users to change their behavior more, users are still more intentional, honest and active in their self-disclosure behaviors among more private-network groups on platforms like Snapchat.

FUTURE RESEARCH, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Future research should investigate these findings to test for more variables and platforms. One limitation of this study is that its sample was composed of university students, a demographic that may be more used to social media platforms than other demographics. Their social media literacy may, in part, explain the varied behavior by

platform, as these users may be able to more critically ascertain changes to their behavior, based on the different SNS they are using. Yet, the rationale for selecting these platforms was that Snapchat and Instagram are two of the main platforms for this demographic category. Thus, future scholarship may want to examine how such users do, or do not, change their self-disclosure behavior when considering other platforms, from Facebook to LinkedIn. Additionally, other demographics should be examined to see if users, be they older users or those without a college education, share similar results.

In conclusion, this study offered theoretical and professional implications by demonstrating that platform difference alone may not be enough to separate out types of users, at least in terms of self-reported behavior. But, upon actual usage, findings demonstrate that users do have different self-disclosure behaviors when using SNS platforms that differ in how public or private their network of friends or audiences are. Upon testing a more private-network SNS like Snapchat, users did report self-disclosure practices that were more honest and intentional. Overall self-disclosure rates were also higher, as compared to a more public-performance based SNS, like Instagram.

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