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Disconnect between intentions and outcomes: A comparison of regretted text and photo social networking site posts

Abstract

Many social networking site (SNS) users regret previous posts and post sensitive content despite the potential for negative consequences. Limited research has examined regret among SNS users, and it is unclear whether regret differs between text and graphic formats. An online survey of Australian SNS users ($N = 995$), compared regretted text to photo and video posts by examining demographic characteristics, psychological antecedents, post content, and consequences of posting. Feelings of regret were similar, however, regretted photo/video posts reported were related to a positive mood when posting, social motivations, and most frequently resulted in personal consequences (e.g., embarrassment). In comparison, regretted text posts were motivated by negative mood states and were more likely to result in social consequences. There may be a disconnect between what users hope to convey and how posts are perceived. SNS design that prompts users to consider the impacts of posts and to screen for offending content may reduce post regret. Interventions should encourage mindfulness of posting when upset and gaining self-validation externally from SNS.

Keywords: social networking sites, photos, text posts, regret, disclosure, social media, motivation

1. Introduction

1.1. Online risk-taking and the posting paradox

Internet use is increasingly common: globally, approximately two-thirds of adults are at least occasional internet users, with adults in Australia reporting the highest internet usage rates (93%) second only to South Korea (94%; Poushter, 2016). Among internet users in Australia, 91% report that they access the internet at least once a day – the highest rate in the world (Poushter, 2016). Moreover, 90% of Australian internet users are active members of at least one social networking site (SNS), such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or LinkedIn (Sensis, 2017). Several benefits of SNS use have been identified, including the maintenance of both close and more distant relationships and enhancement of psychological well-being and self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Utz, 2015). However, risky behaviours on SNSs may result in negative personal and social consequences for users. Although an individual may create a post or send a photo or video to a small group of friends or followers, this content may be shared with a wider group of people than intended (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Online behaviour such as the display of illegal, sexual, or inappropriate content increases one's risk of relationship damage and harassment or cyberbullying victimization (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009; Peluchette, Karl, Wood, & Williams, 2015). Moreover, with many employers and educational institutions monitoring applicants' SNS profiles (Hoek, O'Kane, & McCracken, 2016), posting highly personal or socially inappropriate content to a publicly-accessible profile may damage future occupational or educational opportunities (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Finally, certain online behaviours increase the risk of privacy and security violations; allowing one's profile to be publicly visible, accepting friend requests from strangers, and sharing personal or location information may result in damaging consequences. Such activities may increase the possibility that an individual falls victim to identity theft, misuse of personal information,

or stalking (Bilge, Struge, Balzarotti, & Kirda, 2009; Fire, Goldschmidt, & Elovici, 2014; Gainsbury, Brown, & Rockloff, 2018; Gan & Jenkins, 2015; Vishwanath, 2015).

Research suggests that many SNS users are aware of the risks of posting certain content (Peluchette & Karl, 2008; Root & McKay, 2014). However, this awareness does not necessarily translate into the practice of privacy behaviours. Over half of young adults have posted references to or depictions of substance use (including in jurisdictions where they are below the minimum age), half of young adults' SNS profiles contain profanity, and nearly a quarter contain sexually suggestive content (Becton, Walker, Schwager, & Gilstrap, in press; Erevik, Torsheim, Vedaa, Andreassen, & Pallesen, 2017; Shelton & Skalski, 2014).

Discrepancy between SNS users' concern about the consequences of posting inappropriate content and their actual online behaviour has been dubbed the 'posting paradox' (Miller et al., 2010).

1.1.1. Online regret

The small body of research examining the posting paradox indicates that many SNS users report feelings of regret over something they have posted. A quarter of Australian adult's report feelings of regret over online posts (Office of the Australian Information Commissioner [OAIC], 2017), but it is unclear where such regret stems from. Exploring variables associated with the experience of online regret may be informative for understanding what prompts counterfactual emotions such as regret (Kahneman & Miller, 1986) in online contexts, and for internet users themselves. Regret is a highly uncomfortable – but useful – emotion: individuals go to great length to avoid experiencing regret, and many people who experience regret are motivated to change their behaviour to prevent regretting their actions in the future (Epstude & Roese, 2008; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007).

Using survey and interview data from American adult Facebook users, Wang and colleagues (2011) examined what SNS users regret posting and why. Nearly one-quarter

(23%) of respondents reported regret about Facebook posts. Regretted posts included substance use, sexual content, religion and politics, profanity and obscenity, personal issues, comments about one's workplace, offensive comments, lies, and secrets. Some respondents reported posting because they wanted to be perceived positively, although others reported posting during a period of intense emotion or while they were under the influence of drugs/alcohol. Participants' regret often stemmed from realizing that they had not sufficiently considered how the post would be perceived, who would view it, or the possible consequences.

Wang and colleagues' (2011) findings support previous research aimed at identifying topics that SNS users consider to be inappropriate to post. Sexual content, alcohol consumption, political and religious beliefs, profanity, expression of negative emotion, personal issues, and negative posts about others are commonly endorsed as inappropriate topics to share on Facebook (Muscanell, Ewell, & Wingate, 2016; Roche, Jenkins, Aguerrevere, Kietlinski, & Prichard, 2015; Wolfer, 2017). Similarly, SNS users commonly report deciding against posting opinions, personal information, emotional disclosures, and political content (Sleeper et al., 2013a; Vitak, 2015).

Stern (2015) examined regretted online self-portrayals among undergraduate students. In this study, 40% of participants reported that they regretted an online self-presentation of some form. Nearly half were photos, and over 60% were on the participant's own SNS page or that of another users. Self-portrayals containing content referencing alcohol or drug use were most commonly regretted, followed by expressions of personal opinions or negative comments about others. Individuals reported most often portraying themselves in a way that they regretted because they wanted social approval, to see what would happen, or as a joke. Finally, participants most commonly reported regretting these experiences primarily because

they felt that the portrayal was not an accurate depiction of their true self. Participants also reported experiencing regret because they did not realize the impact or who would view it.

In summary, existing research has provided a description of the content that SNS users commonly regret posting and the reasons why individuals regret posting. However, it is unclear whether certain types of posts are universally regretted or if other variables – personal and contextual – may play a role. Consideration of additional variables may add to our current understanding of the sorts of posts SNS users regret and why.

1.1.2. Online regret and the MAIN model

A potentially important variable is the role of post format, which has not been extensively explored in terms of its relation to online regret. Qualitative evidence suggests users place a strong reliance on photos when forming impressions of other SNS users (McLoughlin & Vitak, 2011). In addition, some photos (e.g., cover photos, profile pictures) may be visible to others outside of a user's online social network (Hum et al., 2011). Sundar's (2008) MAIN (Modality, Agency, Interactivity, Navigability) model provides a conceptual framework explaining how regrets resulting from photo or video posts on SNSs may differ from text-only posts. This model asserts that judgements about the credibility of information encountered in digital media are guided by heuristic processes. The current investigation was concerned with the M component of Sundar's model, which contends that the modality in which information is presented is argued to play a large role in how credible the information is perceived to be. Relative to photographic information, text is argued to be a more abstract modality (Pittman & Reich, 2016) and requires a larger amount of cognitive effort to interpret (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). According to the realism heuristic (Sundar, 2008), richer modalities are perceived as more credible. Compared to text, photographic and video content seems more 'real' and thus is perceived to be more trustworthy. Indeed, research indicates that photos are regarded as highly sensitive information. One study found

that Japanese students were more reluctant to share personal photos than they were to share their mobile phone number or their postal address (Yang & Wang, 2014). Studies investigating the sending and receiving of sexually suggestive material ('sexting') among adolescents and young adults have found higher prevalence rates for text-based sexting than photos (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014), suggesting that individuals who engage in this behaviour are more willing to send sensitive information in textual format.

1.1.3. Post format and demographics

Most Australians own smartphones, and the rate of smartphone ownership has steadily been increasing. Smartphone ownership is particularly common among individuals in younger age groups: over 95% of Australians aged 18 to 39 own smartphones, compared to 75% of those aged 50 to 64 and just 47% of those aged 65 years and older (Sensis, 2017). Similarly, the proportion of adults who have posted or shared images online has increased over time (Duggan, 2013), and mobile photo- and video-share apps such as Instagram and Snapchat have become more popular (Sensis, 2016, 2017). Perhaps not surprisingly, posting or sharing images online as well as using image-based SNSs is most common among younger age groups (Duggan, 2013; Sensis, 2017).

1.1.4. Post format and psychological state

Motivations for posts and consideration of the impacts are important variables to consider. In accordance with the MAIN model, photos are argued to be a more effective medium for conveying an impression to others than text (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Research has identified similar motivations for posting photos as those for using SNSs in general (Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). However, posting photos of oneself ('selfies') to SNSs has found to be commonly motivated by a desire to be perceived in a certain way. Individuals may post selfies to receive social feedback in the form of likes or comments, to make others jealous, or to project an image of happiness, attractiveness, or popularity (Pounders,

Kowalczyk, & Stowers, 2016; Sung, Lee, Kim, & Choi, 2016; Wickel, 2015). Preoccupation with audience perceptions among SNS users who post certain types of photos may reflect more concern about the consequences of posting an image prior to doing so (Katz & Crocker, 2015).

Research has found that many users view the expression of negative emotion on SNSs to be inappropriate (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2012; Feehan, 2014; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011; Rosenbaum, Johnson, Stepman, & Nuijten, 2010). Many Facebook users report that they self-censor posts out of a desire to avoid being perceived as overly negative, or to avoid offending others or starting an argument (Sleeper et al., 2013a). Moreover, regretted Twitter posts ('tweets') are more frequently posted by individuals experiencing highly negative emotional states than those experiencing intense positive emotion (Sleeper et al., 2013b). Given findings that individuals typically report a positive mood state when they post or share images on SNSs (Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Pounders et al., 2016), it is possible that participants who regret text and photo posts may differ in terms of their emotional state at the time of posting.

1.1.5. Post format and content

In addition to an individual's psychological state prior to posting, content of regretted text-only and photo posts may differ. Analysis of controversial content on Facebook profiles has found that photos containing alcohol are more common than text references to alcohol (Beullens & Schepers, 2013; Shelton & Skalski, 2014). Moreover, research examining conflict resulting from sharing an image online found these photos most commonly depicted alcohol consumption and intoxication (Such, Porter, Preibusch, & Joinson, 2017).

In contrast, content analysis of Facebook wall posts has revealed that profanity is more common than references to alcohol or substance use (Shelton & Skalski, 2014). Similarly, profanity is more common than references to alcohol or substance use on text-

based SNSs such as Yik Yak (Black, Mezzina, & Thompson, 2016). Finally, deleted tweets contain more swear words than those which are not deleted, suggesting that regretted text-only posts may frequently contain profanity (Bhattacharya & Ganguly, 2016).

1.1.6. Consequences of posting

The extant literature examining why SNS posts are ultimately regretted indicates that personal consequences, such as feelings of embarrassment, are commonly reported (Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Individuals also frequently report consequences that are relational in nature, such as offending others or damaging a relationship (Paradise, 2012; Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Qualitative research has found that two common sources of regret over photos posted on SNSs among college students are concern over possible future consequences and upsetting or embarrassing others (Paradise, 2012). In addition to the enhanced intimacy (i.e., the degree to which others feel present) offered by photos and videos, such formats may also differ from text-only posts in terms of abstraction and may not result in similar psychological states for users (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Thus, it may be important to examine consequences of regretted text posts and photo/video posts separately.

1.2. The present study

Existing research suggests that posting sensitive or inappropriate content on SNSs is relatively common (Becton et al., 2017; Erevik et al., 2017; Shelton & Skalski, 2014), and an increasing number of SNS users regret something that they have posted (OAIC, 2017). Despite findings that photo regrets are frequently reported (Stern, 2015), it is unclear whether regretted SNS posts differ depending on the format. The aims of the present study were to determine whether regretted photo or video posts differed from text-only posts in terms of the characteristics of participants more likely to regret each type, participants' psychological state leading up to posting, and the extent to which they regretted posting. In addition, the

present study reported participants' reasons for posting, post contents, and the consequences of posting for each type.

RQ1: Do regretted text and photo/video posts differ with regard to participants' psychological state prior to and at the time of posting?

RQ2: Do regretted text and photo/video posts differ with regard to participants' reported reasons for posting?

RQ3: Do regretted text and photo/video posts differ with regard to content?

RQ4: Do regretted text and photo/video posts differ with regard to resultant consequences?

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

Data was collected in October 2016. Australian internet users were recruited by Qualtrics research panel company who provided potential participants with a brief general description of the study and requirements for participation. Eligibility criteria included using SNS at least once per month. After providing informed consent, participants completed an online survey. This study was approved by [deidentified] Human Research Ethics Committee, project no.: #ECN-16-192.

2.2. Participants

The initial sample consisted of 2,758 Australian internet users recruited via Qualtrics online survey panel. Of these, 328 surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses and 363 were excluded after screening for invalid response patterns based on responses provided to open-ended questions within the survey which indicated careless responding (e.g., responses consistently nonsensical or irrelevant to the question at hand). Thus, 2,067 surveys were included in the total sample, yielding a valid completion rate of 85.1%. Over half (56.4%, $n = 1,166$) of participants endorsed experiencing regret from a SNS post. Of these

individuals, 864 (74.1%) reported that the post contained text, 370 (31.7%) reported that the post contained a photo, and 106 (9.1%) reported that the post contained a video. The present study reports on responses from a subsample of participants ($N = 995$) who reported regretted posts consisting of a single format: text only (73.1%, $n = 727$), photos only (23.5%, $n = 234$), and videos only (3.4%, $n = 34$). The two latter groups were combined into a single group for analyses.

Descriptive statistics for the two groups are displayed in Table 1. A slight majority of the sample was female (51.6%), with a mean age of 32.85 years ($SD = 11.37$ years, range: 18-86 years). The majority (85.1%) were born in Australia, and 67.3% were of European ethnic origin. The majority (60.8%) reported post-secondary education, 44.9% reported full-time employment, and 28.3% were married or de facto. Annual income varied, with the largest proportion of participants (27.0%) earning between \$25,000 and \$75,000.

Insert Table 1 about here

2.3. Survey

The portion of the survey assessing regret experiences was utilized for the current study. This portion was largely based on that developed by Wang and colleagues (2011) for their study examining regretted Facebook posts and incorporated findings from Stern's (2015) and Sleeper's (2013b) investigations of regretted online self-presentations.

2.3.1 Demographic information. The survey collected information on participant gender, age, ethnicity, country of origin, annual income, educational attainment, employment status, and marital status.

2.3.2. Regret. Participants were asked to choose one post they regretted the most. For subsequent questions, participants were instructed to think about this post.

2.3.2.1. Extent of regret. Participants indicated on a five-point Likert scale the extent to which they regretted making the post (1 = only a little bit; 5 = I deeply regret it).

2.3.2.2. Post format. Participants indicated whether the post was in text, photo, video, and/or another format.

2.3.3.3. Mood. On a five-point Likert scale, participants indicated their mood when they made the post (1 = very negative; 5 = very positive).

2.3.3.4. Concerns prior to posting. Participants were asked whether they had any concerns about the post before posting it on a four-point Likert scale (1 = I didn't think about it; 4 = I thought about it, and I had strong concerns).

2.3.3.5. Reasons for posting. Participants were asked to indicate which reason(s) best explained why they posted from a list of 16 options (multiple responses permitted) (see Appendix). These reasons were grouped into four broad categories: emotional expression, social connection, entertainment, and social pressure (Choi & Bazarova, 2014; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015; Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Responses within each category were summed, with higher scores indicating stronger motivation for a given category.

2.3.3.6. Post content. Participants indicated the content(s) of the post from a checklist of 14 options (multiple responses permitted) (see Appendix). These contents were grouped into five broad categories: profanity, deviant behaviour, personal and polarizing views, content about others, and lies or misrepresentations (Sleeper et al., 2013; Stern, 2015; Wang et al., 2011; Wolfer, 2017). Participant responses were summed for each category, with higher scores indicating more of each type of content.

2.3.3.7. Consequences of posting. Participants indicated the consequence(s) of the post from a checklist of 15 options (multiple responses permitted) (see Appendix). These consequences were categorized into personal, social, and legal/financial/occupational consequences (Debatin et al., 2009; Peluchette et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Participants' endorsement of each type of consequence was summed, with higher scores indicating more consequences of

each type. In addition, participants indicated if someone viewed the post outside of the intended audience. These responses were dichotomized (yes, no/don't know).

2.4. Analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS version 24 software. Four binary logistic regression analyses were performed, each controlling for participant age, gender, and ethnicity. The first analysis examined participant levels of regret, mood at the time of posting, concerns prior to posting, and whether participants were under the influence of alcohol or other substances at the time of posting. Second, we assessed whether participants' reasons for posting differentiated the two regretted post types. Third, we assessed whether post content differentiated the two regretted post types. Finally, we examined differences in consequences experienced by the two groups of participants because of posting as well as whether an unintended audience had viewed posts.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary findings

Prior to collapsing participants who regretted photo and video posts into a single group, a series of chi-square analyses and t-tests were performed to determine whether the two groups differed from one another. Results of these analyses indicated differences in gender ($\chi^2 = 4.56, p = .033$), age ($t = 3.50, p < .01$), average income ($\chi^2 = 8.26, p < .01$), full-time employment status ($\chi^2 = 10.49, p < .01$), reports of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of posting ($\chi^2 = 12.77, p < .001$), level of concern about the post prior to posting ($t = 3.67, p < .001$), posts being seen by an unintended audience ($\chi^2 = 3.89, p = .049$), and the extent to which participants reported regretting the post ($t = 2.19, p = .03$). More specifically, relative to those who regretted photo posts, participants who regretted video posts were more frequently male, older, earned higher incomes, and a larger proportion worked full-time. Individuals who regretted video posts were also more likely to report being

under the influence of substances at the time of posting, were more concerned about the post prior to posting, were more likely to report that the regretted post had been viewed by an unintended audience and reported higher levels of regret over the post.

3.2. Post format and psychological state

Results are presented in Table 2. The first binary logistic regression analysis examined whether participants' psychological state at the time of posting (mood, concerns about the post, and the influence of drugs or alcohol) differentiated the two regretted post types. The model was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 145.37, p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .20$, indicating that the set of predictors reliably distinguished between participants who regretted text and photo/video posts. Controlling for demographic characteristics, only participant mood when posting was a significant predictor (OR = 1.82, 95% CI: 1.60-2.08). Individuals who regretted posting photos or videos reported being in a significantly more positive mood at the time of posting relative to individuals who regretted text posts. These results are consistent with previous findings that swearing on Facebook, an occurrence that may likely lead to regret, is associated with negative emotion and a lack of cognitive control (impulsivity) and that these actions are mostly unplanned (Turel & Qahri-Saremi, 2018).

Insert Table 2 about here

3.3. Post format and reasons for posting

The second binary logistic regression analysis examined whether participants' reasons for posting differentiated between the two post types. The model was significant, $\chi^2(7) = 173.44, p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .24$. As indicated in Table 3, social pressure (OR = 2.66, 95% CI: 1.82-3.90) and emotional expression (OR = 0.25, 95% CI: 0.18-0.34) were significant predictors in the model, indicating that photo/video posts were more likely to be motivated for social pressure reasons and text posts were more frequently motivated by a need for emotional expression.

Insert Table 3 about here

3.4. Post format and post content

Results of the third binary logistic regression analysis are presented in Table 4. The overall model was significant, $\chi^2 = 131.04$, $p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .18$. Controlling for demographic characteristics, deviant behaviour (OR = 2.67, 95% CI: 1.94-3.68), personal or polarizing views (OR = 0.62, 95% CI: 0.42-0.89), lies and personal misrepresentations (OR = 1.46, 95% CI: 1.02-2.07), and profanity (OR = 0.28, 95% CI: 0.19-0.42) were significant predictors, indicating that regretted photo/video posts more commonly contained depictions of deviant behaviour and lies or personal misrepresentations, while regretted text posts more commonly contained personal or polarizing views and profanity.

Insert Table 4 about here

3.5. Post format and consequences of posting

The final binary logistic regression analysis examined whether consequences of posting and whether posts being viewed by an unintended audience differentiated the two formats. The overall model was significant, $\chi^2 (7) = 83.46$, $p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .12$. As indicated in Table 5, regretted photo/video posts resulted in more personal consequences (OR = 1.65, 95% CI: 1.31-2.08), and regretted text posts resulted in more social consequences (OR = 0.66, 95% CI: 0.56-0.78).

Insert Table 5 about here

4. Discussion

4.1. Regretted SNS posts and the MAIN model

The present study aimed to extend existing research on the online regret experience by examining the characteristics and consequences of regretted SNS posts that contained photos or videos and those that contained only text. According to the MAIN model (Sundar, 2008), we use the realism heuristic when we encounter richer modalities such as photos or

videos. Consequently, our interpretation of such information requires less effort compared to textual formats, and photos and videos are perceived to be more credible. In the context of the present study, photo/video posts were not regretted to a significantly greater degree than were text posts. However, there were numerous significant differences in terms of these regretted posts.

4.2. Regretted SNS posts and demographic characteristics

Contrary to Stern's (2015) finding, the present study found that most participants regretted text-based posts. It is unclear if the younger age of those who regretted photo posts is reflective of research indicating that younger individuals are more likely to post and share photos on SNSs (Duggan, 2013; Sensis, 2017). It is possible that individuals who post a larger number of photos (i.e., younger SNS users; Duggan, 2013) have a greater possibility of experiencing regret. Alternatively, regret may stem from younger individuals posting content that may be perceived as inappropriate by those in their network. Moreover, the consequences of posting such content may be more severe for younger individuals, whose actions may affect future educational or career prospects to a larger degree than older age groups with more established networks and foundations.

In terms of gender, females were more likely than males to report regretting a photo/video post. This is consistent with females being more likely to use image-based SNSs such as Instagram or Snapchat (Sensis, 2017) and females more likely to be judged negatively than males for similar behaviour on SNSs (Stoll, 2015; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008).

4.3. Regretted SNS posts and psychological state

Greater concerns prior to posting regretted posting photos and videos than text is consistent with research that individuals consider the potential outcomes of posting photos before doing so (Katz & Crocker, 2015). Although not measured directly, text posts may be

made more impulsively given that these were more frequently motivated by negative mood and emotional expression as opposed to being in a positive mode and seeking social validation for photos, which is consistent with previous findings (Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Pounders et al., 2016; Waddell, 2016; Wang et al., 2011; Wickel, 2015).

4.4. Content of regretted posts

Relative to text posts, regretted photo/video posts were more likely to contain depictions of socially deviant behaviour, such as substance use, sexual content, and references to violence. Such findings may support the realism heuristic. That is, SNS users may not be more likely to post such inappropriate content in photo or video format relative to text, but more likely to report that they regret photo or video posts that reference these, potentially due to the enhanced credibility offered by these modalities.

4.5. Consequences of posting

Individuals who regretted photo or video posts were more likely to report personal consequences such as embarrassment, while regretted text posts were more likely to result in social consequences. This may support Van Der Heide and colleagues' (2012) finding that text presented alone has a strong impact on social judgements. Alternatively, regretted text posts may be more likely to be directed at others than the user, creating a greater likelihood of causing offence.

4.6. Implications

Results of the current study suggests that fewer users may regret text posts if SNS design prompted greater consideration of the implications of posts. Wang and colleagues (2013) found that time delays and checks prior to posting were considered helpful for users, particularly when in a heightened state of emotion. Content analysis screening for potentially inappropriate or offensive remarks may also be useful in reducing regret, if notifications are provided prior to posting (Wang et al., 2013). However, notifications encouraging

consideration of outcomes may not be useful when individuals misjudge the way a post may be perceived. Photos of who may see a post may be a useful reminder to assist with this. Sites should educate users that their posts may be seen by a broad audience, particularly posts made on other users' pages/posts, and shared by others beyond their control as this has been shown to be a cause of regret (Marwick & Body, 2014).

Importantly, the present study identified important differences between text and photo posts. Sites with a high degree of photo posting should place more emphasis on screening for socially inappropriate content, or warnings regarding these. In comparison, SNS based on text posts should allow self-set blocks or limits on posting when users are upset, prompt users to consider the potential consequences of posting. Educational programs, particularly for younger users, could potentially discuss social pressure related to SNS and encourage young people not to be overly concerned with validation gained via these networks. Public health campaigns should encourage SNS users to avoid posting when upset and to see SNS as useful for social sharing, but not to rely on these for social validation or expect accurate depictions of others.

4.7. Limitations and future directions

The present study has several limitations; data collected from online panels is not representative of the general population (Heen, Lieberman, & Miethe, 2014). Our results are not reflective of the general Australian population. As age and gender differences were identified as significant factors these should be explored in more detail in future studies. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a wide age range within this study is a significant strength, given that many previous studies on the topic of online regret have focused on young adult and adolescent samples. The present study did not explore the role of ethnicity in depth, however, differences in psychological antecedents, reasons for posting, post content, and consequences of posting were found between participants reporting European as opposed to

non-European ethnicity. This may reflect differences in cultural values and practices – individualistic versus collectivist concerns, for example (Komiya, Miyamoto, Watabe, & Kusumi, 2011). The role of participant culture and ethnic origin in the experience of online regret may be a worthwhile focus in future studies. The reliance on retrospective self-reports makes it unclear whether experiencing consequences contributed to feelings of regret among the participants as distinct from the regretted post. Future studies could use real-time reporting to examine regrets as they occur. Finally, given that many photos on SNSs are accompanied by text (e.g., Piwek & Joinson, 2016), our exclusion of participants who reported multiple formats is a limitation deserving of attention in future research. An important avenue for future research is to understand the factors associated with behaviour change resulting from online regret.

5. Conclusion

The present study extended past research by considering the role of post format in the relationship between online risk-taking and regret among a sample of Australian adults. Results indicated differences in participants' psychological state prior to posting, reasons for posting, post contents, and the consequences participants experienced as a result of posting. Findings of the present study may be informative for SNS users, those who aim to develop features of SNSs to enhance personal privacy, by demonstrating that different interventions are likely to be effective to reduce regret related to text as opposed to photo posts.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for participants who regretted text posts ($n = 727$) and photo/video posts ($n = 268$) on SNSs.

Variable	<i>N</i>	Text posts		Photo/video posts		Sig.
		<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Gender (female)	995		358 (49.2)		155 (57.8)	.016
Age	989	34.03 (11.64)		2.88 (1.60)		< .001
Education (postsecondary)	995		451 (62.0)		154 (57.5)	.190
Employment (full-time)	995		327 (45.0)		120 (44.8)	.954
Income < \$75,000	875					.055
≥ \$75,000			344 (53.2)		138 (15.8)	
Marital status (married)	995		303 (46.8)		90 (39.5)	.082
Country of origin (Australia)	995		217 (29.8)		65 (24.3)	.668
Ethnicity (European)	985		621 (85.4)		226 (84.3)	.001
Regret (1-5)	992	3.34 (1.33)		3.19 (1.30)		.124

Table 2. Results of binary logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between post format and psychological antecedents.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	Sig.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.63	.17	13.16	< .001
Age	-0.05	.01	29.10	< .001
Ethnicity (0 = non-European, 1 = European)	-0.49	.17	8.51	.004
Mood	0.60	.07	79.01	< .001
Concerns	-0.10	.09	1.38	.241
Drugs/alcohol	0.25	.21	1.35	.245

Table 3. Results of binary logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between post format and reasons for posting.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	Sig.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.58	.17	11.89	.001
Age	-0.03	.01	17.37	< .001
Ethnicity (0 = non-European, 1 = European)	-0.47	.17	8.06	.005
Social connection	-0.15	.14	1.19	.276
Social pressure	0.98	.20	24.96	< .001
Entertainment	0.13	.16	0.67	.414
Emotional expression	-1.42	.17	69.70	< .001

Table 4. Results of binary logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between post format and post content

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	Sig.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.27	.17	2.56	.110
Age	-0.04	.01	21.57	< .001
Ethnicity (0 = non-European, 1 = European)	-0.39	.16	4.34	.037

Profanity	-1.28	.20	39.33	< .001
Deviant behaviour	0.98	.16	36.06	< .001
Personal/polarizing views	-0.49	.19	6.54	.011
Content about others	-0.16	.20	0.61	.434
Lies/misrepresentations	0.38	.18	4.33	.037

Table 5. Results of binary logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between post format and the consequences of posting.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	Sig.
Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.30	.16	3.45	.063
Age	-0.03	.01	14.88	< .001
Ethnicity (0 = non-European, 1 = European)	-0.40	.16	6.67	.010
Unintended audience	0.23	.16	1.96	.161
Personal consequences	0.50	.12	17.82	< .001
Social consequences	-0.41	.08	24.86	< .001
Legal, financial, or professional consequences	0.48	.29	2.74	.098

Appendix. Categorization of survey items for reasons for posting, post content, and consequences of posting^a.

Reasons for posting		Items
	Social connection	I wanted to congratulate or wish someone happiness I wanted to tell my friends what I was doing I wanted to give emotional support I wanted to share good news I wanted to get some advice I wanted to share bad news
	Social pressure	To please someone else Others made similar posts I thought it would make me look good
	Entertainment	I thought it was useful or interesting I thought it was fun or humourous
	Emotional expression	I was mad at someone or something I wanted to share my feeling or opinion I was excited about someone or something
Post content ^b		
	Deviant behaviour	Sexual content Tobacco, alcohol, or drug use Guns or violence
	Personal or polarizing views	Personal feelings, experiences, or beliefs Politics Religion
	Content about others	Sensitive information about work, employer, university (or other) Negative or unflattering content about others
	Misrepresentations or lies	Misrepresentation of myself A lie
Consequences		
	Personal	It embarrassed me I lost respect
	Social	It was misunderstood by other people It damaged a relationship It affected someone else It offended someone or a group of people It revealed a secret
	Legal, financial, or occupational	It caused serious problems at my workplace/university I got into legal trouble

I got fired/expelled

I got into financial trouble

^a Not all items featured in the survey were included in categorization.

^b The post content category 'Profanity' consisted of a single item and was entered as a dichotomous variable in analyses.