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Positive Shift, Social Projection, and Honesty on Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Positive emotions are prevalent on Social Networking Sites (SNS) because of positive shift—users’ tendency to shift the expression of their emotions in the more positive direction. Emotion expressers aim to gain a more positive impression and elevate their social standing through positive shift, but little is known about the unintended consequences of positive shift for the expressors. Drawing on social projection theory and emotional journey theory, we argue that positive shift can lead to social projection and reduce the expressor’s perceived honesty of other SNS users—an important antecedent of trust and satisfaction with SNS, and this is more likely to occur when the user shifts emotions with higher emotional dissonance (i.e., difference between expressed and experienced emotions). We further propose a diversity reminder as a likely remedy that suppresses the social projection process. Using two experiments, we found evidence supporting these predictions. Our findings provide important implications.

Keywords

Positive shift, honesty, social projection, diversity, emotional journey.

INTRODUCTION

Sharing uplifting content is a common display rule on SNS (Ziegele and Reinecke 2017). This unwritten rule likely motivates SNS users to frequently share their positive events and positive emotions. However, real-life experiences are not always positive enough to fulfill this display rule, and SNS users often engage in positive shift—a behavior of shifting their emotional expressions in a more positive direction than their felt emotions (Bledow et al. 2011). Positive shift is also more likely to occur in the online environment of SNS because of its unique characteristics: the lack of immediacy or nonverbal cues on SNS enables users to take their time in crafting a post and exaggerate their feelings to achieve a more positive self-image (Ziegele and Reinecke 2017). Not surprisingly, many SNS users resort to positive shift to maintain a positive look, seek social attention, and realize social benefits (e.g., nurturing trusted social relationships) (Bazarova et al. 2013).

However, little research has explored the unintended consequences of SNS users’ positive shift for themselves,

and we focus on honesty in this paper. Defined as being truthful in one’s words and actions to others (Levine and Cohen 2018), honesty is an important building block of interpersonal communications and the foundation of social relationships that SNS users aspire to. Honesty can be about oneself, and it can also be about others (Levine and Cohen 2018). In the latter case, perceptions of others’ honesty can influence one’s generalized trust in others—trust rested in a broader group of people rather than an individual (Nannestad 2008), and such perceptions can also influence user satisfaction and future engagement.

Given the importance of other-honesty (in addition to self-honesty) and limited scholarly attention to the unintended consequences of positive shift for SNS users themselves, we investigate three inter-related questions in this research: How does positive shift influence SNS users’ perceptions of other users’ honesty, and why? What intervention can be introduced and implemented to alleviate potential unintended consequences? Drawing on social projection theory (Ross et al. 1977), we propose that SNS users engaged in positive shift will likely perceive their behaviors as dishonest (or less honest), and they may further project self-perceptions of dishonesty to perceptions of others’ honesty because SNS users are embedded in the same environment with similar motivations (e.g., to present the self in a positive light). In addition, we extend emotional journey theory and propose emotional dissonance—incongruence between inner feelings and expressions (Pugh et al. 2011)—as a potential boundary condition for the likelihood of positive shift to reduce self-honesty perceptions. We apply this theory to SNS and argue that SNS users engaged in positive shift are more likely to feel dishonest themselves when the emotional dissonance is higher. In addition, given the danger of one’s social projection of dishonesty from self to others that harms trust building and future SNS engagement, we propose a reminder of SNS diversity as a possible remedy. People generally have a similarity bias, whereby people ascertain others’ characteristics from their own characteristics (Van Boven et al. 2012).

We conducted two experimental studies and found support for these hypotheses. This research makes three primary contributions. First, we extend the investigation of positive emotions and positive shift in SNS from the perspective of observers (e.g., Krasnova et al. 2015) to that of emotion

expressors. Second, while the prior literature largely views the effect of positive shift to be stable (Qiu et al. 2012), we reveal emotional dissonance as a theory-driven boundary condition. Finally, by uncovering that positive shift as a hedonic behavior can surprisingly lead to undesirable outcomes, we provide a likely explanation to the decrease of perceptions of others' honesty on SNS and provide a remedy to mitigate the harm.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Positive Shift, Honesty Perceptions, and Emotional Dissonance

SNS are designed as a platform for users to actively create and share information. As such, SNS enable users to present themselves in a positive light (Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012). This is evidential from the functional design of SNS, such as the affordance of reaction with "likes" and the sharing of content with specific groups of people (Blumberg et al. 2016). With the assistance of these functions, SNS users can garner positive evaluations from others and maintain a positive public image (Blumberg et al. 2016). Thus, when SNS users post content online and share their experiences, they tend to keep their emotional expressions positive. This also aligns with the common observation that SNS users seemingly live a happier than average life and frequently share positive emotions (Bazarova et al. 2013).

But how can users maintain a positive outlook on SNS while real-life experiences may not be that positive? A likely answer is that SNS users regulate their emotional expressions. We draw on emotional journey theory to explain this phenomenon. This theory portrays the emotion regulation process as an emotional journey and distinguishes different aspects of such a journey (Scott et al. 2020). The first aspect pertains to the direction and distance of the journey. For example, SNS users can take a positive direction in the emotional journey by shifting from a negative inner feeling (the journey origin) to a positive public display (the journey destination), and the difference between the origin and the destination is the distance. Extending the concept of affective shift (valence-based shift such as from a neutral feeling to a positive feeling) (see Bledow et al. 2011), we define positive (affective) shift as the emotional voyage from a negative, neutral, or positive inner feeling to a more positive public display. Thus, positive shift describes the distance of an emotional journey in a positive direction (Scott et al. 2020).

SNS users' positive shift may have direct implications on their self-perceptions of honesty. Honesty is defined as conveying truthful information to others (Levine and Cohen 2018). It reflects one's moral value and guides ethical behavior. Self-perceptions of honesty, or self-honesty, are one's awareness of their being truthful with themselves. Positive shift creates a gap between initial, genuine feelings and public displays, and at the same time it creates a gap between the moral baseline of being truthful and one's behavior. As positive shift drives one away from

the moral baseline, they should view themselves as dishonest. Thus, we propose the first hypothesis below.

H1: SNS users' positive shift reduces their self-perceptions of honesty.

While positive shift describes the travel distance and direction of a journey, the consequences of positive shift may be dependent on another aspect of the emotional journey: travel method (Scott et al. 2020). Emotional travel method is also called emotional labor, describing *how* people travel from the initial feelings to a publicly observable display (Hochschild 1979). For instance, a journey by walking up to the summit on foot is more exhausting than taking a skyride. We focus on emotional dissonance, defined as the discrepancy between feelings and expressions (Pugh et al. 2011). Emotional dissonance differs from emotional distance in that the latter concerns the distance between origin (initial feelings) and destination (expressed emotions), whereas the former concerns the way of getting to the destination. At one extreme (high emotional dissonance), an individual pretends to display certain emotions without changing one's inner feelings. At the other extreme, an individual modifies one's inner feeling to match the emotional expressions that one attempts to display, leading to low emotional dissonance.

We argue that the level of emotional dissonance can moderate the impact of positive shift on self-honesty as proposed in H1. The reason is that a shift in the valence of emotional expressions (from the original feelings) should be interpreted differently depending on the nature of the shift. When emotional dissonance is high, the shift is achieved via pretending, and people tend to perceive themselves (after the shift) as in conflict with their self-concepts, which is threat to their moral integrity and self-worth (Sherman and Cohen 2006). Thus, positive shift in this situation is more likely to translate to a worsened perception of the self. In contrast, when emotional dissonance is low, the shift is achieved via modifying the initial inner feelings to match the expressed emotions before the expression. After this modification, the expression of a positive self-image should be much more consistent with their inner self and deviate less from the moral baseline. In this situation, the negative impact of positive shift on self-perceptions of honesty should weaken. Thus, we propose the second hypothesis below.

H2: Emotional dissonance moderates the relationship between positive shift and self-perceptions of honesty, such that as emotional dissonance increases, the negative relationship between positive shift and self-perceptions of honesty will become stronger.

Social Projection and Diversity Reminder

In addition to self-perceptions of honesty, another relevant concept on SNS is the perceptions other SNS users' honesty. Perceptions of other SNS users' honesty is directly associated with one's attitude towards both other SNS users, such as generalized trust in other SNS users

(Mayer et al. 1995) and one’s attitude towards SNS platforms, such as SNS satisfaction (Bhattacharjee 2001). Thus, it is important to understand the driving force of perceptions of others’ honesty, whereby self-perceptions of honesty are likely the answer.

Extending the social projection theory (Levine and Cohen 2018), we argue that one’s self-perception of honesty can influence their perceptions of others’ honesty. Social projection theory posits that individuals have the tendency to believe their own beliefs or perceptions to be in common with those of others, and they tend to project their own beliefs or perceptions onto others (Ross et al. 1977). The process of projection is especially likely to occur when there is a lack of information about others. In the absence of sufficient information, individuals are inclined to fill in the information gap by assuming others to be similar as oneself (i.e., a similarity bias) and relying on their own experiences as a reference point to make sense of others (Krueger 2008). For instance, without information about others, individuals spontaneously assume others to share the same political view as them (Van Boven et al. 2012).

We propose that SNS users’ self-perceptions of honesty are positively associated with their perceptions of other SNS users’ honesty. According to social projection theory, people’s perceptions of others’ characteristics are largely influenced by their perceptions of themselves (Ross et al. 1977). They attempt to ascertain others’ characteristics from their own characteristics and may subsequently adjust their beliefs as additional information becomes available. In our context, SNS users are especially likely to engage in social projection since users lack information about who might read the post. Moreover, SNS platforms leverage

recommendation systems, such as the friending mechanism of “People You May Know” on Facebook, to selectively display users with content that they can resonate, which enhances their similarity bias. Taken together, once an individual develops certain self-perceptions (e.g., self-perceptions of honesty), they may assume others to be similar to oneself and project the self-perceptions to general others on SNS. In other words, when SNS users perceive themselves as honest, they will likely perceive other users as being honest too.

H3: SNS users’ self-perceptions of honesty on SNS are positively associated with their perceptions of other users’ honesty on SNS.

Finally, we propose a diversity reminder as a possible intervention to weaken the social projection process. Given the premise of social projection that people assume others to be similar to themselves (Kenny and West 2010), a reminder for SNS users that people are different and others may be dissimilar should logically weaken the similarity bias and reduce social projection as a result. A diversity reminder has been shown to be effective in reducing the assumed similarity and altering the social projection process in offline social interactions (Gollwitzer et al. 2017). The final hypothesis is proposed below and the conceptual model is provided in Figure 1.

H4: A diversity reminder (which makes differences among SNS users salient) weakens the association between SNS users’ self-perceptions of honesty and their perceptions of others’ honesty on SNS.

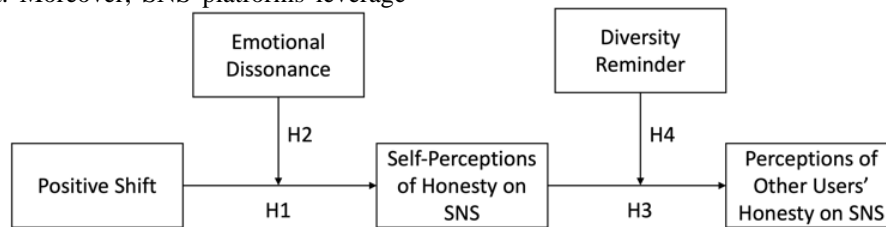


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

STUDY 1

To test these hypotheses, we conducted two studies. In the first study, we manipulated SNS users’ positive shift (vs no shift) in a between-subjects experiment to test the first three hypotheses and showcase the importance of perceptions of other users’ honesty (via their impact on generalized trust in other users and satisfaction with SNS).

Stimulus Materials

To manipulate positive shift, we first asked all participants to recall a “somewhat negative event from the recent past that you can remember vividly” and “describe what happened and your feelings about the event.” We used this recalling approach instead of asking participants to imagine a certain emotion-eliciting scenario because recalling is less artificial and it has been used as an

effective strategy to manipulate participants’ felt emotions (Dalgleish et al. 2009). Next, we asked participants to compose a post about the event and imagine posting it on their most used SNS. Participants in the positive shift condition were asked to “express feelings that are more positive than your actual feelings about the event.” Participants in the no shift condition were asked to “express your actual feelings about the event.”

Procedure and Measures

We recruited undergraduate students from a large U.S. university who participated for extra credit. As a cover story, we told the participants that we were interested in their SNS use. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: positive shift and no shift.

We first asked the participants to report how long they have been using SNS in years, the average time they spent on SNS every day, and the most frequently used SNS. The purpose of this procedure was to get the participants involved and create a more realistic and personalized setting for the ensuing experiment (Luo et al. 2020). Then participants were asked to think of a somewhat negative event in the past and describe it. After writing down the description of the event, they composed a post for the event while expressing either more positive or actual feelings in the post, depending on their assigned condition.

Afterwards, we measured relevant constructs, starting with the most downstream consequences. Using a 7-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” we measured their generalized trust in other SNS users (four items, e.g., “I would be willing to let others on [choice of SNS] know what is going on with me”) (Mayer and Davis 1999) and their satisfaction with SNS (four items, e.g., “I feel good after writing a post on [choice of SNS]”) (Bae 2018).

In addition, participants reported their perceptions of other SNS users’ honesty using three items adapted from Wojciszke et al. (1998) (e.g., “... perceive yourself on [choice of SNS] as honest”) on a 5-point scale ranging from “very slightly or not at all” to “very much.” Using the similar items and the same rating scale, participants then reported their self-perceptions of honesty (e.g., “... perceive other people on [choice of SNS] as honest”). They reported their emotional dissonance using 6 items adapted from Blau et al. (2010) on a 7-point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (three items such as “I tried to feel the positive emotions I wanted to show in my post”, and three reversely coded items such as “I pretended the emotions I need to show for my post”). Finally, we used three items adapted from Hamilton et al. (2009) along a 7-point Likert scale as a manipulation check of positive (vs. no) shift (e.g., “... shared more positively than my existing emotion”).

Results

We received responses from 158 participants (74 female). The average age of participants was 19 years. They have been using SNS for 7 years on average, and they have spent an average of 2.8 hours per day on SNS. All constructs passed the thresholds of reliability and validity. We averaged the items of each construct before further analysis.

We first conducted a manipulation check for positive shift. Results showed that the manipulation was successful as participants in the positive shift condition engaged more in positive shift than participants in the no shift condition ($M = 4.892$ vs 3.726 , $t(152) = 5.701$, $p < 0.01$).

Next, we explored the moderating effect of emotional dissonance on the relationship between self-perceptions of honesty and other SNS users’ honesty using OLS regression. Results revealed a positive effect of positive shift ($b = 1.033$, $SE = 0.530$, $p = 0.053$), a positive effect of

emotional dissonance ($b = 0.674$, $SE = 0.357$, $p = 0.061$), and a significant interaction effect ($b = -0.324$, $SE = 0.141$, $p = 0.023$). These results indicate that emotional dissonance moderates the effect of positive shift on perceptions of other users’ honesty such that the negative impact of positive shift on perceptions of others’ honesty is strengthened as emotional dissonance gets higher.

Then we used conditional PROCESS analysis to test H1, H2, and H3 (Hayes 2022). We used model 7 with positive shift as IV, self-perceptions of honesty as mediator, perceptions of other users’ honesty as DV, and emotional dissonance as the moderator that moderates the path from IV to mediator. Results showed that positive (vs. no) shift was not significantly associated with participants’ self-perceptions of honesty ($b = -0.195$, $SE = 0.161$, 95% Confidence Interval = $[-0.461, 0.071]$, $p = 0.228$), not supporting H1. Emotional dissonance was not associated with participants’ self-perceptions of honesty either ($b = 0.444$, $SE = 0.411$, CI = $[-0.237, 1.124]$, $p = 0.283$). Most importantly, we found a significant interaction between positive shift and emotional dissonance on participants’ self-perceptions of honesty ($b = -0.324$, $SE = 0.163$, CI = $[-0.594, -0.054]$, $p = 0.049$), supporting H2. Notably, when emotional dissonance was low (2.667, -1SD), the effect of positive shift on self-perceptions of honesty was not significant ($b = 0.125$, $SE = 0.229$, LL = -0.254 , UL = 0.505 , $p = 0.586$), but when emotional dissonance was high (4.500, +1SD), the effect was significantly negative ($b = -0.515$, $SE = 0.226$, CI = $[-0.889, -0.141]$, $p = 0.024$). After controlling for the direct effect of positive shift on participants’ perceptions of other users’ honesty, the effect of self-perceptions of honesty on perceptions of other users’ honesty was significantly positive ($b = 0.251$, $SE = 0.064$, CI = $[0.146, 0.356]$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H3.

Finally, we used OLS regression to test the effect of perceptions of other users’ honesty on generalized trust in other SNS users and satisfaction with SNS. We found that perceptions of others’ honesty were positively associated with both generalized trust in other SNS users ($b = 0.317$, $SE = 0.118$, $p < 0.01$) and SNS satisfaction ($b = 0.268$, $SE = 0.106$, $p = 0.012$).

Discussion

In the first study, we demonstrated that positive shift decreased perceptions of other users’ honesty, but only when emotional dissonance was high. We further explored the social projection process and found that self-perceptions of honesty could be projected to the perceptions of others’ honesty. We also demonstrated the importance of perceptions of others’ honesty by revealing a positive effect on two downstream consequences, generalized trust in other users and satisfaction with SNS.

Nonetheless, we did not find support for H1 in this study, and this result is not too surprising given the presence of an interaction. For example, it is like that the average of emotional dissonance among participants in this study was

biased towards a low level. We did not test H4 either. To address these limitations, we conducted the next study.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we manipulated two factors—the presence of positive shift and the presence of diversity reminder—in a between-subjects experiment.

Stimulus Materials and Procedure

We used similar cover story and procedure as in Study 1 with the following exceptions. First, after writing the post (positive shift or no shift, depending on the randomly assigned condition) and reporting self-perceptions of honesty, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (orthogonal to the first random assignment): diversity reminder versus no reminder. In the diversity reminder condition, participants read that “According to a recent industry report, users on [choice of SNS] come from diverse backgrounds and are different from each other,” and were then asked to “list three characteristics below that you think distinguish you from others on [choice of SNS].” Participants in the no reminder condition did not see these instructions but proceeded directly to the measures of the remaining constructs including generalized trust in other SNS users, satisfaction with SNS, perceptions of other SNS users’ honesty, their emotional dissonance, and the manipulation check question for positive (vs. no) shift using the same items and rating scales as in Study 1. As an attention check of the diversity (vs. no) reminder, we asked participants to recall whether they saw the diversity reminder and whether they were asked to list three characteristics that distinguished them from others.

Results

We recruited 237 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk. The final number of participants after dropping those who failed the attention check of the diversity (vs. no) reminder was 179 (116 female). The average age of participants was 43 years. They have been using SNS for 13 years on average, and they have spent an average of 2.4 hours per day on SNS. All constructs passed the thresholds of reliability and validity. We averaged the items of each construct before further analysis.

The manipulation check indicated that our manipulation was successful, as participants in the positive shift condition reported a greater extent shift toward more positive emotions in their posts than those in the no shift condition ($M = 5.126$ vs 2.959 , $t(176) = 10.267$, $p < 0.01$).

We next used OLS regression to explore the moderating effect of emotional dissonance on the relationship between self-perceptions of honesty and other SNS users’ honesty. Results showed that positive shift was positively associated with perceptions of other users’ honesty ($b = 1.597$, $SE = 0.588$, $p < 0.01$) while emotional dissonance was not significantly associated with perceptions of other users’ honesty ($b = 0.151$, $SE = 0.171$, $p = 0.380$). There was a negative interaction between positive shift and emotional

dissonance on perceptions of other users’ honesty ($b = -0.631$, $SE = 0.203$, $p < 0.01$), replicating findings in Study 1.

We used model 7 of the conditional PROCESS model to test our hypotheses (Hayes 2022). In the model, we had positive shift as IV, self-perceptions of honesty as mediator, perceptions of other users’ honesty as DV, emotional dissonance as the first moderator that moderates the path from IV to mediator, and a diversity reminder as the second moderator that moderates the path from mediator to DV. Results showed that positive shift was negatively associated with self-perceptions of honesty ($b = -0.259$, $SE = 0.139$, $CI = [-0.488, -0.029]$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H1. We found emotional dissonance was negatively associated with self-perceptions of honesty ($b = -0.429$, $SE = 0.089$, $CI = [-0.576, -0.281]$, $p < 0.01$). The interaction between positive shift and emotional dissonance was negatively associated with self-perceptions of honesty ($b = -0.252$, $SE = 0.116$, $CI = [-0.443, -0.061]$, $p = 0.031$), supporting H2. Specifically, when emotional dissonance was low (1.667, $-1SD$), the effect of positive shift on self-perceptions of honesty was not significant ($b = 0.050$, $SE = 0.191$, $LL = -0.267$, $UL = 0.367$, $p = 0.794$), but when emotional dissonance was high (4.000, $+1SD$), the effect was significantly negative ($b = -0.567$, $SE = 0.205$, $CI = [-0.906, -0.229]$, $p < 0.01$). We controlled for the direct effect of positive shift on participants’ perceptions of other users’ honesty when testing H3 and H4. Results showed that a diversity reminder was not significantly associated with perceptions of others’ honesty ($b = 0.022$, $SE = 0.144$, $CI = [-0.216, 0.260]$, $p = 0.879$), while self-perceptions of honesty was positively associated with perceptions of others’ honesty ($b = 0.542$, $SE = 0.094$, $CI = [0.386, 0.698]$, $p < 0.01$). The interaction between self-perceptions of honesty and a diversity reminder was negatively associated perceptions of others’ honesty ($b = -0.312$, $SE = 0.125$, $CI = [-0.518, -0.105]$, $p = 0.013$), indicating that a diversity reminder can mitigate the projection of self-perceptions of honesty to perceptions of others’ honesty and supporting H4.

We finally tested the effect of perceptions of others’ honesty on generalized trust in other SNS users and satisfaction with SNS using OLS regression. Again, we found that perceptions of others’ honesty were positively associated with both generalized trust in other SNS users ($b = 0.601$, $SE = 0.095$, $p < 0.01$), and satisfaction with SNS ($b = 0.420$, $SE = 0.080$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion

This study replicated key findings in Study 1. In addition, we found support for H1, showing that positive shift can decrease self-perceptions of honesty. We also found support for H4. This indicates that a diversity reminder can weaken the social projection of honesty on SNS.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The reduction in perceptions of other SNS users’ honesty can reduce a user’s generalized trust in other SNS users and

increase the user's dissatisfaction with SNS, both of which can threaten the longevity of SNS platforms. We investigated how and when positive shift, a prevalent sharing strategy on SNS could reduce perceptions of other SNS users' honesty on SNS through the social projection process. We further found that the provision of a diversity reminder (making differences among SNS users salient) is effective in mitigating this social projection process.

Theoretical Implications

This research provides several important theoretical implications. First, the prior literature has examined the implications of positive emotions and positive shift for emotion observers, whereas we explore their implications for emotion expressors. Prior studies acknowledge the nature of SNS as information broadcasting platforms, and they investigate how people react to the awash of positive information on SNS, such as reacting with anxious and envious feelings (Krasnova et al. 2015). Although the behavior of positive shift is driven by the goal of elevating social standing and self-worth (Nadkarni and Hofmann 2012), its actual consequences on emotion expressors are less clear. This research demonstrates that positive shift can have unintended consequences of decreasing SNS users' self-perceptions of honesty, indicating that positive shift is not only harmful to observers as found in prior literature but also harmful to expressors.

Second, we introduce a theory-driven boundary condition—emotional dissonance—into the scholarly discourse of positive shift. Extending the emotional journey theory (Scott et al. 2020), we investigate how different aspects of an emotional journey might interact. Our results showed that instead of viewing the effect of positive shift as stable, it is actually contingent on the emotional travel method—emotional dissonance. This indicates that a focus only on the travel distance and direction as represented by positive shift is not sufficient, because the impact of positive shift is not universal and its negative consequences for oneself only emerge when emotional dissonance is high. These findings demonstrate the importance of a joint investigation of different aspects of an emotion journey in studying emotional regulation in SNS.

Third, we provide a likely explanation to why people may perceive other SNS users as dishonest. Specifically, positive shift as a behavior of sharing positive event involves a social projection process and leads to negative outcomes. We reveal that positive shift can be a source of perceptions of others' dishonesty, which is closely associated with generalized trust in other SNS users and SNS satisfaction. Different from prior literature that focuses on other users' misbehavior as a source of one's decreased perceptions of others' honesty (Bapna et al. 2017), we demonstrate that SNS users themselves are the source because SNS users themselves who engage in positive shift tend to project their own dishonesty to their perceptions of others.

Practical Implications

This research also provides notable practical insights. First, we offer an explanation for the trust decline and dissatisfaction on SNS platforms. Users report a decline of trust in content shared on SNS and dissatisfaction with SNS, which can discourage users from continued engagement and platform use. From our findings, the decline of trust and dissatisfaction is an endogenous process, since positive shift with high emotional dissonance by users themselves can reduce their self-perceptions of honesty and subsequent perceptions of others' honesty, which can decrease their generalized trust in other users and lead to dissatisfaction with SNS. Thus, SNS platforms can intervene with users' emotion regulation behavior. For instance, SNS platforms can use the prompt of the text box to nudge users to avoid self-presentation via positive shift that involves high emotional dissonance. Second, we offer SNS platforms a solution to the decline of trust and dissatisfaction. Our findings identify a diversity reminder on SNS as a remedy to reduce the social projection that contributes to reduced perceptions of other SNS users' honesty. SNS platforms can remind users that they are different from each other to weaken the social projection of dishonesty and mitigate the decline of trust and dissatisfaction. For instance, SNS platforms can insert pop-up windows to notify users that the SNS community is composed of people from diverse backgrounds and are different from each other to decrease the similarity bias (e.g., "Embrace diversity on our SNS!").

Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations that constitute promising directions for future research. First, we focus on positive shift due to its prevalence in the real-world SNS use. Nonetheless, SNS users sometimes use SNS as a venue to seek social support by sharing negative emotions. Thus, future research can examine whether SNS users' negative shift has similarly detrimental impacts on perceptions of honesty of other SNS users. Second, although we investigate perceptions of other SNS users' honesty as it has significant implications, it is important to acknowledge the coexistence of diverse groups of users, such as influencers and regular users. For instance, perceptions of influencers' honesty can be comparatively stable given influencers' frequent self-disclosure and persuasion tactics on SNS (Saternus et al. 2022), indicating our framework may not apply as well to the perceptions of dishonesty and distrust of SNS influencers. Thus, future research may extend our framework by investigating different groups of users as a boundary condition.

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