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Gender, Emotional Intelligence, and the Need for Popularity: Exploring the Causes of Faux Pas Posting Beyond the Behavior of Friends

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Abstract

Inappropriate, or faux pas, posting on social media can negatively impact students while in college and after graduation. To better understand this phenomenon, researchers have investigated various factors that influence students to engage in this risky behavior. Previous research has shown the posting behavior of close friends to be a significant predictor of a student's own inappropriate posting. This study builds on existing literature by exploring gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity as potential causes of faux pas posting beyond the behavior of friends. Specifically, a survey of undergraduate college students (N=209) was used to measure the constructs of interest on four social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Supporting previous research, the results indicate the posting behavior of friends was a significant predictor of both general and specific faux pas posting across all four social media platforms. Although gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity were significantly related to faux pas posting on one or more platforms, none of the constructs provided more explanatory power than friend posting behavior alone. The study provides a discussion of these results and their implications for developing interventions and future research.

Keywords: Cybervetting, gender, emotional intelligence, need for popularity, faux pas posting

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1. Introduction

Social media is so appealing to college students that 98% of them have accounts where they spend one to three hours each day (Ha et al., 2018; Tayo et al., 2019). Students spend their time on social media in a variety of ways, including sharing personal updates, connecting with friends, and commenting on social/political issues. College students are avid users of social media. In fact, emerging adults account for the largest social media usage compared to all other age groups (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Through their social media use, students can express themselves, connect to like-minded communities, and make new friends. While these benefits are significant, there are also negative outcomes that bear consideration.

Social media use has been shown to have a negative impact on college students' schoolwork (Junco & Cotten, 2011). Given the time that some students spend on social media, this may not seem that surprising. Even so, social media use can also have negative impacts that are less intuitive. As an example, social media use can negatively impact students' chances for employment after graduation. This is especially true if the students have engaged in posting behavior that would be considered inappropriate by potential employers. Recruiters are increasingly reviewing the social media content posted by job candidates as a part of the hiring process (Gruzd et al., 2020; Jacobson & Gruzd, 2020; Laukkarinen, 2023; Melão & Reis, 2021). These reviews, known as cybervetting, can uncover content that raises "red flags" for recruiters. Posting these types of inappropriate content (e.g., drug use, sexual activity, racist comments) has come to be known as faux pas posting (Karl et al., 2010). Given that students and young adults are the age group most likely to engage in faux pas posting (Roulin, 2014), this is a serious problem. Even after students are employed, social media use can still be risky. Faux pas posting is a common reason given by employers for termination. This is especially true in industries like business, medicine, and teaching (Barlow et al., 2015; Harwin, 2019; MacKenzie, 2016).

Previous research (Miller, 2020) has shown that the posting behavior of close friends has a significant impact on the content posted on students' social media platforms. Students whose friends post inappropriate content are more likely to post inappropriate content themselves. Friend posting behavior has even been shown to be a better predictor of student faux pas posting than the Big Five personality traits (Miller, 2020). Clearly, a student's friends matter when it comes to the content they post on social media.

While the posting behavior of friends is significant, the question remains – are there other factors that impact a student's decision to post inappropriate content? The current study will address this question by exploring potential factors drawn from existing research. Specifically, the study will explore the impact of gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity (NfP) on inappropriate social media posts by college students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Inappropriate Social Media Posting

Social media is ubiquitous and college students are some of its most avid users. While students engage in social media for many different reasons, there are risks associated with its use - especially if that use involves posting content that is inappropriate, offensive, or unprofessional. Even when inappropriate posts are made to a select group of friends or followers, they can easily be shared outside of the student's intended audience. Some students post inappropriate content without giving their actions much thought, while other students view their posting behavior as a protected exercise of free speech. Regardless of their rationale, many of these students will come to learn that inappropriate, or faux pas, social media posting can have serious consequences.

Inappropriate posting behavior can be risky for students while they are still in school. Several universities have disciplined students for faux pas posting behavior, even when the posts were made in an off-campus setting (Barlow et al., 2015; Harwin, 2019). Students in disciplines such as medicine, teaching, or business who make inappropriate or unprofessional posts have been scrutinized both by their universities and their employers (Barlow et al., 2015; MacKenzie, 2016; Miller, 2020; Roulin, 2014). In their 2015 study, Barlow et al. examined the posting behavior of medical students in Australia, defining unprofessional content as "an online depiction of illegal activity, overt intoxication or illicit drug use, or the posting of patient information" (p. 2). Medical students in the study were largely aware of professionalism standards concerning social media use. The vast majority (90.5%), even agreed or strongly agreed that they were held to a higher standard for social media use than the general public. Unfortunately, this awareness of standards had little impact on actual posting behavior, given the prevalence of unprofessional content posted by

students in the study.

Faux pas posting can negatively impact students even after they graduate. As an example, a student who posts inappropriate content may find it harder to get a desired job. It has become common practice for recruiters to review the social media accounts of job candidates, often referred to as cybervetting (Roulin, 2014). Faux pas posts uncovered during these reviews can lead to negative hiring decisions. Even after a student gets employed, the risks of faux pas posting do not end. As many students have learned, employers are legally able to fire employees based on the content of their social media posts (MacKenzie, 2016; Spencer, 2022).

Given that students are aware of the risks posed by inappropriate posting on social media (Root & McKay, 2014), why do they continue to engage in this behavior? Researchers have attempted to answer this question by investigating several possible factors. One factor that has proven to be significant is the posting behavior of the students' close friends.

2.2 Friend Posting Behavior

The attitudes and values of a social group can have a powerful influence on the behaviors of individuals within the group. Likewise, culture and accepted norms for communication impact an individual's interactions within the group. Consistency of attitudes and behaviors of an individual in a social group will lead to further consistency of attitudes and behaviors as compared to individuals that have inconsistent attitudes and behaviors (Triandis, 1980).

Triandis' (1980) findings can be applied to college students in a social media setting. Specifically, students are swayed by the culture and accepted norms of their group – in this case, their social media friends. These influences can impact a student's social media posting behavior within the group. Those students who consistently mold their behavior to the group's norms and expectations may also become more accepting of those expectations. In this way, the posting behavior of a student's friend group ultimately shapes their own posting behavior.

Miller (2020) applied these psychological concepts to the impact of close friends on inappropriate social media postings. He found that students engage in more negative and inappropriate posting if similar content is present in their friends' postings. This result was significant for two reasons. First, the posting behavior of close friends proved to be a better predictor of student faux pas posting than any of the other factors considered in the study, including numerous personality traits. Second, the relationship between friend and student posting behavior was significant on multiple social media platforms. Students with friends who posted inappropriate content on Facebook or Twitter were more likely to post inappropriate content on the matching platform. The significance and persistence of friend posting behavior makes it a valuable predictor of faux pas posting by college students. That said, are there factors beyond friend posting behavior that can help explain faux pas posting?

2.3 Gender

Numerous previous studies (e.g., Karl et al., 2010; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014) have shown that there are significant differences in social media use between males and females. Some of these differences include the types and quantity of content disclosed by each gender.

In their 2014 study, Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz examined the impact of gender differences on Facebook content posted by college students. College students were chosen for the study sample because they tend to be highly motivated to acquire friends through social media. The researchers were interested to know the types of content students would post to accomplish this goal. After examining the students' user profiles and cover photos, the researchers noted significant differences in content based on gender. Specifically, they found that males primarily posted images and information that would promote their status and demonstrate risk-taking behavior. Females preferred to share cover photos that focused on family and expressed emotions in their profiles.

Researchers like Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz explain these apparent gender differences using evolutionary psychology. They argue that the gender differences seen on social media have evolved over generations and are innate. Other researchers prefer Social Role Theory, arguing that gender differences are social expectations that are encouraged and taught. In the end, whether the differences are innate or social (or some combination of both), gender clearly plays a role in social media use and the content that is posted.

2.4 Personality Traits: Emotional Intelligence and Need for Popularity

Researchers have long sought to relate social media use with specific personality traits. Much of this research has centered on the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism). While this research has produced mixed results (e.g., Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013; Marshall et al., 2015), there remains a persistent belief among many researchers that personality plays a role in social media use. This belief has led researchers to examine other connections between personality and social media, including personality's relationship with inappropriate posting.

Karl et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and faux pas posting by Facebook users. The results show that participants who scored high in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism were less likely to post inappropriate content. More recent studies have found similar results. Miller (2020) extended the Faux Pas Scale developed by Karl et al. (2010) to include additional inappropriate behaviors identified by recruiters used for cybervetting. Participants' personality traits were again assessed using the Big Five, while they reported their faux pas activity on Facebook and Twitter separately. Participants with high levels of conscientiousness were less likely to post inappropriate content on Facebook, while those with high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness were less likely to post inappropriate content on Twitter. At the same time, participants high in openness reported high levels of inappropriate posting on Twitter.

Moving beyond the Big Five, Newness et al. (2012) added emotional intelligence to the list of personality traits being studied in relation to faux pas posting. In their study, they defined emotional intelligence as a set of interrelated skills concerning the ability to regulate and control the emotions of the self and others. Newness et al. (2012) argued that emotionally intelligent individuals will understand what types of information are appropriate and inappropriate. Additionally, individuals with emotional intelligence will be aware of the social consequences of making inappropriate posts. As such, they hypothesized that emotionally intelligent individuals will be less likely to engage in faux pas posting. While the study results support this hypothesis, emotional intelligence did not, in fact, predict faux pas posting beyond the level already accounted for by the Big Five personality traits. This leaves the final impact of emotional intelligence somewhat undecided.

Another personality trait that has been investigated in relation to social media use is need for popularity. According to Utz et al. (2012), need for popularity (NfP) can be viewed as a chronic desire to be viewed as popular. Individuals high in NfP are motivated to take actions that will make them appear popular. Social media is an ideal tool for individuals high in NfP because it provides a venue with a large audience where selective self-presentation is possible. In terms of college students with high-NfP personalities, social media gives them the ability to create impressive self-promotional profiles to share with their friends and others. These profiles can be managed to present the most up-to-date content – all in an effort to be maintain the image of popularity.

Researchers have shown that NfP is a significant predictor of social media posting behaviors (Utz et al., 2012). Of particular interest to this study, NfP was positively related to both self-presentation and disclosure of feelings. Given that how an individual presents themselves often depends on the situation and audience, students high in NfP could be more inclined to actively present an online image that is in-line with their audience, i.e., their close friends. At the same time, students high in NfP could also be more likely to disclose personal feelings to others. In a social media context, this means that NfP might lead students to post content that is more personal and emotional. This could result in students posting material that a more rational filter would have prevented.

3. Research Questions

Attempts to identify the factors that affect a student's decision to post inappropriate content have been mixed. The best predictor appears to be the posting behavior of close friends because it is both significant and persistent across platforms. That said, other factors have been shown to have an impact on student use of social media and the content they post (e.g., Karl et al., 2010; Newness et al., 2012; Utz, et al., 2012). While some of these factors have already been shown to be significant predictors of faux pas posting on one or two social media platforms, examining their impact across multiple platforms is worthwhile as a measure of their persistence. Ideally, these factors would prove to be significant beyond the predictive ability of friend posting behavior. To investigate these factors, the following research questions should be addressed:

RQ1: Does a student's gender affect their level of faux pas posting?

RQ2: Does a student’s emotional intelligence affect their level of faux pas posting?

RQ3: Does a student’s NfP affect their level of faux pas posting?

RQ4: Does a student’s gender affect their level of faux pas posting beyond the posting behavior of their close friends?

RQ5: Does a student’s emotional intelligence affect their level of faux pas posting beyond the posting behavior of their close friends?

RQ6: Does a student’s NfP affect their level of faux pas posting beyond the posting behavior of their close friends?

4. Research Method

4.1 Measures

Emotional Intelligence

To measure the emotional intelligence of participants, the scale developed by Wong and Law (2002) was used. The 16-item scale asks participants about their ability to understand and regulate their emotions and the emotions of others. Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

Need for Popularity (NfP)

Participant NfP was measured using the 12-item scale developed by Santor, Messervey, and Kusumaker (2000). The scale asks participants to report their willingness to do certain things in order to be viewed as popular by friends. Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

Revised Faux Pas Scale

The Revised Faux Pas Scale was used to assess the level of inappropriate posting by participants and their close friends. The scale was developed by Miller (2020) using a combination of items from the original Faux Pas Scale (Karl et al., 2010) and new items that recruiters had determined to be problematic when cybervetting job candidates. Specifically, the revised scale asks if the social media account in question contains a lot of the given item. The eight items include “alcohol references,” “drug references,” “sexist comments,” “racial comments,” “gun references,” “profanity,” “sexual references,” and “political comments”. Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

4.2 Participants

Study participants were recruited from undergraduate business courses at a large university in the Midwest United States. Given the research questions, the use of college students is appropriate since they are avid social media users, preparing to enter the job market, and their posting behavior can impact their employability. Participants were asked to complete a short online survey (Appendix I). All survey questions were evaluated and approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Based on the nature of the questions, the students were assured that, if they chose to participate, their responses would remain anonymous.

5. Results

In total, 209 students (57.4% male) participated in the study. The mean age was 21.38 years (SD = 2.54), with a range from 18 to 39. Of the 209 participants, 172 (83.7%) had Facebook accounts, 130 (62.2%) had Twitter accounts, 184 (88.0%) had Instagram accounts, and 180 (86.1%) had Snapchat accounts. A detailed gender breakdown by platform is provided in Table 1.

	N	Male	%	Female	%
Facebook	172	94	54.7%	78	45.3%
Twitter	130	79	60.8%	51	39.2%
Instagram	184	102	55.4%	82	44.6%
Snapchat	180	101	56.1%	79	43.9%

Table 1. Gender breakdown by platform

Miller and Melton (2015) have shown that students don't exhibit the same posting behavior across social media platforms. For this reason, participants were asked to complete the Revised Faux Pas Scale based on their own posting behavior on each platform separately. They were also asked to complete the scale based on the posting behavior of their close friends for each platform separately. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics and reliabilities for these faux pas scores, along with emotional intelligence and NfP.

Measure	Mean	SD	α
Emotional Intelligence	5.405	0.714	0.864
Need for Popularity	3.217	1.129	0.905
Facebook Faux Pas (Self)	1.666	1.145	0.934
Facebook Faux Pas (Friend)	2.908	1.532	0.929
Twitter Faux Pas (Self)	2.238	1.502	0.932
Twitter Faux Pas (Friend)	3.058	1.596	0.927
Instagram Faux Pas (Self)	1.813	1.204	0.916
Instagram Faux Pas (Friend)	2.824	1.515	0.913
Snapchat Faux Pas (Self)	2.086	1.308	0.905
Snapchat Faux Pas (Friend)	3.122	1.589	0.918

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Measures

A review of the results in Table 2 indicates that faux pas scores for friend accounts are all higher than the scores students reported for themselves on the same platform. The results also indicate that the Revised Faux Pas Scale is highly reliable ($\alpha > .900$) regardless of platform.

In terms of faux pas content, Table 3 shows the relative ranking (most to least common) of each item, by platform.

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat
Political (2.16)	Political (2.86)	Alcohol (2.36)	Alcohol (3.04)
Profanity (1.92)	Profanity (2.71)	Political (2.21)	Profanity (2.76)
Alcohol (1.72)	Alcohol (2.35)	Profanity (2.01)	Drugs (2.31)
Guns (1.63)	Drugs (2.33)	Drugs (1.76)	Sexual (2.07)
Sexual (1.6)	Sexual (2.28)	Sexual (1.73)	Political (1.82)
Drugs (1.49)	Guns (1.81)	Guns (1.55)	Guns (1.6)
Sexist (1.42)	Sexist (1.81)	Sexist (1.47)	Sexist (1.6)
Racial (1.4)	Racial (1.73)	Racial (1.41)	Racial (1.48)

Table 3. Faux Pas Item Ranking (most to least common) by Platform

The results in Table 3 indicate that, while there are some differences in the relative rankings by platform, posts with comments about politics, alcohol, and profanity are the most common. On the other end of the ranking, sexist and racial comments are the least common, regardless of platform.

5.1 Relationship of Gender, Emotional Intelligence, and NfP with Faux Pas Posting

To address research questions 1-3, correlations were calculated between the constructs of interest (gender, emotional intelligence, NfP, and friend faux pas posting) and the students' own faux pas scores for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. The correlations are shown in Table 4.

	n	Gender	Emotional Intelligence	Need for Popularity	Friend Faux Pas
Facebook	171	0.083	-0.093	0.059	0.488**
Twitter	130	0.137	-0.177*	0.210*	0.746**
Instagram	184	0.181*	-0.135	0.191**	0.628**
Snapchat	179	0.072	-0.180*	0.241**	0.697**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4. Faux Pas (Self) Correlations

The significant correlations reported in Table 4 indicate that gender, emotional intelligence, NfP, and friend faux pas posting are each related to inappropriate posting by students on one, or more, social media platforms. For gender, the only significant relationship with faux pas posting is on Instagram. The positive correlation means that males are more likely to post inappropriate content on the platform as compared to females. Emotional intelligence is significantly correlated to faux pas posting on Twitter and Snapchat. In both cases, the relationship is negative meaning that students who are lower in emotional intelligence are more likely to post inappropriate content on these platforms. NfP is significantly related to faux pas posting on Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. These positive relationships indicate that students with a high NfP are more likely to post inappropriate content. Finally, faux pas posting by close friends is significantly correlated with inappropriate posting by students on all four platforms.

To further explore the relationships between the constructs of interest and faux pas posting, correlations were calculated between the constructs and the eight items of the Revised Faux Pas Scale for each social media platform (Tables 5-8).

	n	Gender	Emotional Intelligence	Need for Popularity	Friend Faux Pas
Alcohol	171	0.166*	-0.061	0.035	0.437**
Drugs	170	0.165*	-0.172*	0.118	0.410**
Sexist	171	0.042	-0.063	0.022	0.359**
Racial	171	0.026	-0.081	0.021	0.356**
Gun	171	0.058	-0.076	0.067	0.435**
Profanity	171	0.076	-0.127	-0.003	0.496**
Sexual	171	0.039	-0.048	0.021	0.408**
Political	170	0.015	-0.018	0.107	0.365**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 5. Facebook Faux Pas (Self) Item Correlations

Table 5 shows that gender is significantly related to posting about alcohol (0.166) and drugs (0.165). This means that males are more likely to post about alcohol and drugs on Facebook than females. Emotional intelligence also has a significant relationship with posting about drugs. In this case, the correlation (-0.172) is negative, meaning that students high in emotional intelligence will be less likely to post content about drugs on Facebook. NfP has no significant relationships with the faux pas items on Facebook. Finally, inappropriate posting by friends on Facebook is significantly related to all eight faux pas items.

	n	Gender	Emotional Intelligence	Need for Popularity	Friend Faux Pas
Alcohol	130	0.051	-0.042	0.246**	0.645**
Drugs	130	0.065	-0.111	0.261**	0.623**
Sexist	129	0.177*	-0.205*	0.146	0.625**
Racial	130	0.145	-0.220*	0.194*	0.577**
Gun	130	0.161	-0.132	0.164	0.613**
Profanity	129	0.130	-0.232**	0.129	0.666**
Sexual	130	0.137	-0.189*	0.115	0.681**
Political	130	0.082	-0.064	0.151	0.543**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 6. Twitter Faux Pas (Self) Item Correlations

A review of Table 6 shows that gender has a significant relationship with posting sexist content (0.177), meaning that males are more likely to post sexist material on Twitter than females. Emotional intelligence is significantly related to four types of inappropriate content on Twitter: sexist comments (-0.205), racial comments (-0.220), profanity (-0.232), and sexual references (-0.189). The negative correlations indicate that students with high emotional intelligence are less likely to post sexist, racial, profane, or sexual content. NfP is significantly correlated with posts containing alcohol references (0.246), drug references (0.261), and racial comments (0.194), meaning students with a need to be popular will be more likely to post alcohol, drug, and racial content. As with Facebook, inappropriate posting by friends is also related to posting about all eight faux pas items on Twitter.

	n	Gender	Emotional Intelligence	Need for Popularity	Friend Faux Pas
Alcohol	183	0.166*	-0.057	0.202**	0.515**
Drugs	184	0.227**	-0.157*	0.123	0.569**
Sexist	184	0.176*	-0.111	0.132	0.456**
Racial	182	0.125	-0.136	0.172*	0.459**
Gun	184	0.217**	-0.039	0.168*	0.448**
Profanity	183	0.143	-0.148*	0.116	0.602**
Sexual	184	0.126	-0.141	0.184*	0.538**
Political	183	0.036	-0.085	0.132	0.445**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 7. Instagram Faux Pas (Self) Item Correlations

Table 7 shows that gender has a significant positive relationship with posts containing alcohol references (0.166), drug references (0.227), sexist comments (0.176) and gun references (0.217). This means that males are more likely than females to post these types of material on Instagram. Emotional intelligence is significantly related to alcohol references (-0.157) and profanity (-0.148) indicating that students with high emotional intelligence are less likely to post content containing alcohol references and profanity. NfP is significantly correlated with posts containing alcohol references (0.202), racial comments (0.172), gun references (0.168), and sexual references (0.184). This means that students with a need to be popular will be more likely to post alcohol, drug, and racial content. As with Facebook and Twitter, inappropriate posting by friends is also related to posting about all eight faux pas items on Instagram.

	n	Gender	Emotional Intelligence	Need for Popularity	Friend Faux Pas
Alcohol	179	-0.023	-0.155*	0.233**	0.544**
Drugs	178	0.009	-0.168*	0.202**	0.582**
Sexist	177	0.126	-0.130	0.173*	0.516**
Racial	178	0.088	-0.138	0.226**	0.476**
Gun	179	0.103	-0.107	0.200**	0.513**
Profanity	178	0.022	-0.171*	0.171*	0.609**
Sexual	179	0.072	-0.126	0.208**	0.642**
Political	179	0.142	-0.115	0.124	0.454**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 8. Snapchat Faux Pas (Self) Item Correlations

Reviewing Table 8 shows that gender has no significant relationship with the faux pas items on Snapchat. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, is significantly related to posts containing alcohol references (-0.155), drug references (-0.168), and profanity (-0.171). Students with high emotional intelligence would, therefore, be less likely to post these types of content. NfP is significantly correlated with seven of the faux pas items. Only political comments are not related to NfP on Snapchat. Finally, faux pas posting by friends on Snapchat is related to all eight of the faux pas items.

5.2 Explanatory power beyond friend posting behavior

The results in Table 4 show that faux pas posting by close friends is related to a student's level of inappropriate posting on all four social media platforms. Perhaps more importantly, the results in Tables 5-8 show that friend faux pas posting is related to all eight of the faux pas items, regardless of platform. These findings support the conclusions from previous research that friend posting behavior is a significant and persistent factor in a student's decision to post inappropriate content.

At the same time, the results in Tables 4-8 also show that gender, emotional intelligence, and NfP have significant relationships with general, and specific, faux pas posting. While these constructs are clearly relevant to the faux pas posting discussion, the question remains, do they add any explanatory power beyond that provided by friend-posting behavior?

To address the question for each construct (research questions 4-6), a four-step hierarchical regression was performed for each social media platform (Tables 9-12).

	Beta	R ²	Δ R ²
Step 1		0.238***	
Facebook Faux Pas (Friend)	0.365***		
Step 2		0.244***	0.006
Facebook Faux Pas (Friend)	0.364***		
Gender	0.180		
Step 3		0.244***	0.000
Facebook Faux Pas (Friend)	0.365***		
Gender	0.180		
Emotional Intelligence	0.010		
Step 4		0.245***	0.001
Facebook Faux Pas (Friend)	0.368***		
Gender	0.175		
Emotional Intelligence	0.007		
Need for Popularity	-0.020		

p<0.05, **p<0.01, *p<0.001*

Table 9. Hierarchical Regression for Facebook Faux Pas (Self)

Table 9 shows the results of the hierarchical regression for Facebook. In the first step of the regression, friend faux pas posting was entered as the control variable. Friend faux pas posting was found to be significant with the model explaining 23.8% of the variance in inappropriate posting behavior. In the following three steps, gender, emotional intelligence, and NfP were added respectively. Although each step of the regression produced a significant model, none of the added constructs was significant. The change in R² produced by each step was also not significant.

	Beta	R ²	Δ R ²
Step 1		0.556***	
Twitter Faux Pas (Friend)	0.702***		
Step 2		0.563***	0.007
Twitter Faux Pas (Friend)	0.696***		
Gender	0.257		
Step 3		0.564***	0.001
Twitter Faux Pas (Friend)	0.691***		
Gender	0.251		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.063		
Step 4		0.564***	0.000
Twitter Faux Pas (Friend)	0.689***		
Gender	0.253		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.061		
Need for Popularity	0.013		

p<0.05, **p<0.01, *p<0.001*

Table 10. Hierarchical Regression for Twitter Faux Pas (Self)

The four-step hierarchical regression for Twitter can be seen in Table 10. Again, friend faux pas posting was added in the first step, producing a significant model that explained 55.6% of the variance in inappropriate posting behavior. Just as with Facebook, the addition of gender, emotional intelligence, and NfP produced significant models but none of the constructs proved to be significant. The change in R² was also not significant for the step two, three, and four models.

	Beta	R ²	Δ R ²
Step 1		0.394***	
Instagram Faux Pas (Friend)	0.500***		
Step 2		0.407***	0.012
Instagram Faux Pas (Friend)	0.490***		

Gender	0.270		
Step 3		0.407***	0.000
Instagram Faux Pas (Friend)	0.489***		
Gender	0.270		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.012		
Step 4		0.410***	0.004
Instagram Faux Pas (Friend)	0.478***		
Gender	0.291*		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.004		
Need for Popularity	0.068		
<i>*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001</i>			

Table 11. Hierarchical Regression for Instagram Faux Pas (Self)

Table 11 shows the results of the hierarchical regression for Instagram. As with Facebook and Twitter, friend faux pas posting produced a significant model in step one, explaining 39.4% of the variance in inappropriate posting behavior. Emotional intelligence and NfP were not significant when added to the model. While gender was significant in the step four model, no model produced an R² change that was significant compared with the step one model.

	Beta	R ²	Δ R ²
Step 1		0.486***	
Snapchat Faux Pas (Friend)	0.572***		
Step 2		0.488***	0.002
Snapchat Faux Pas (Friend)	0.571***		
Gender	0.121		
Step 3		0.489***	0.001
Snapchat Faux Pas (Friend)	0.566***		
Gender	0.124		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.048		
Step 4		0.490***	0.001
Snapchat Faux Pas (Friend)	0.556***		
Gender	0.142		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.041		
Need for Popularity	0.052		
<i>*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001</i>			

Table 12. Hierarchical Regression for Snapchat Faux Pas (Self)

Finally, Table 12 shows the results of the hierarchical regression for Snapchat. Much like Facebook and Twitter, only friend faux pas posting proved to be significant, producing a model in step one that explained 48.6% of the variance in inappropriate posting behavior. None of the other constructs were significant, nor were the changes in R² for steps two, three, and four.

In terms of the research questions, the results of the hierarchical regressions indicate that gender, emotional intelligence, and NfP do not appear to significantly affect a student’s level of faux pas posting beyond that already explained by the posting behavior of their close friends for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat.

6. Discussion

The objectives of this study were 1) to better understand connections between gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity and level of inappropriate posting; and 2) to gain insight into how gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity affect posting behavior beyond the posting behavior of close friends. The results from this study provide valuable insights into both of these research questions, although more inquiry is needed in several areas.

Friends’ influence on posting behaviors clearly emerged as the most compelling factor in the study. The influence of friends was a pronounced and common thread that ran throughout the findings, crossing all four platforms and all eight

content areas. Perhaps more remarkable, the study's failure to locate explanatory power beyond friends' influence underscores its outsized importance in college student's posting behavior.

That being said, the study's findings related to other factors were also important and point to promising avenues for additional study. Of note, gender was found to be tied to inappropriate posting, with males being more prone than females to engage in inappropriate posting, pointing to the need for further research. Additionally, capacities such as emotional intelligence and the need for popularity were clearly connected to individuals' internet behavior. Each of these three observations is noteworthy in isolation, but together they paint a more complex picture of the varied forces involved in the persistent phenomenon of faux pas posting.

Other findings were less pronounced, but some outlines can be drawn. For example, it seems that Instagram is associated with different posting behaviors by gender, perhaps reflecting different overall uses and expectations for the platform. For emotional intelligence, both Snapchat and Twitter are meaningfully connected, which is interesting, given the very different private and public orientations, respectively, of these platforms. And when it comes to the need for popularity (NfP), Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat are associated, perhaps reflecting the overall virtual location of where students vie for popularity now. Not surprisingly, Facebook is somewhat of an outlier in this regard; similar to other studies (e.g., Pew 2023), it does not seem to be a site of active engagement, possibly being used mainly to connect with older family members or organizations and is therefore in a different category from other platforms. Yet, even Facebook conforms to the general pattern of the outsized importance of friends' posting behaviors on participants' own.

7. Implications and Future Research

Building on the findings of previous research, this study is the first to investigate the impact of friends' behavior on student posting across four of the most commonly used social media platforms. The study's results confirm that the influence of friends is significant across all four platforms. Given the differences in the design and uses of these platforms, the persistence of friends on posting behavior is of particular interest and calls for further research.

If faux pas posting is a continuing problem, one possible way to address it would be to develop targeted educational interventions that include friends as a major focal point. We know that for young adults, who may not yet have formed a strong sense of self, the influence of friends can be great. That effect was so great in this study as to suggest that the effectiveness of potential interventions by parents, teachers, or others may be quite limited, compared to the influence of friends, when it comes to faux pas posting. Thus, a friends-based influence program would likely be more effective than a purely posting-focused training program or educational regime. Given the significance and persistence of this finding, determining *how* to do these things well is an important site for future research.

At the same time, while findings related to friends were key, this study is also the first to investigate the impact of gender, emotional intelligence, and need for popularity in the context of faux pas posting across multiple social media platforms. Although the results in these areas do not show additional explanatory power for these constructs, the significant relationships between the constructs and faux pas posting bear further investigation. Faux pas posting is a serious issue—affecting students, graduates, and employed professionals. Understanding the factors that lead to faux pas posting is a first step in ultimately designing effective interventions. For instance, factors such as emotional intelligence and need for popularity (NfP) were shown to be related to inappropriate posting by students on several social media platforms and should also be considered. As with the recognition of the influence of friends, these findings suggest that interventions focused on posting behavior itself may not be as effective as building up students' underlying capacities. For example, given the negative relationship of emotional intelligence to faux pas posting, a course in emotional intelligence may have a strong beneficial effect on student decision-making in this area. While there does not seem to be an obvious strategy to address the relationship between need for popularity (NfP) and inappropriate posting, these findings serve as a reminder that social media platforms are a key site for many students to pursue the need for popularity. As such, social media platforms need to be conscious of their design choices and how those choices will ultimately affect their users and their posting behavior.

Additionally, the greater propensity of males to post inappropriate content is also an important consideration in intervention efforts and platform design. This finding was common enough across several platforms and content types that it deserves additional attention. As with the influence of friends on posting behavior, this finding is not all that surprising, given the generally slower pace of emotional and academic development of males compared to females and generally negative trends in male educational attainment, which are leading to lower professional attainment and consequent negative impacts on society (Reeves, 2022). However, the pervasive nature of these findings also points to

an important consideration for educators, policy makers, and designers: the ubiquity of the relationship of gender and inappropriate posting suggests that it is not simply a matter of individual agency but that a wider lens must be used in research to understand and respond to it, a need that is underscored by the range of potential negative consequences.

Finally, while there may be a role for education and training in the effort to address faux pas posting, there is an even greater place for the social media platforms and their system designers, given their ubiquity and power to shape behavior. Increased pressure from the public has focused on ethical design from social media platforms (Center for Humane Technology, 2022). Such pressure has already led to legislative action at the state (Kern, 2022) and federal (Jalonick, 2023; Poonia, 2023) levels, as well as legal action in the courts (Sherman, 2023). The government is now actively questioning the pervasive nature of social media in the lives of young people. These questions do not solely involve content but are focused on a variety of issues including addictive algorithms (Kern, 2022), data privacy (Jalonick, 2023), and transparency (Poonia, 2023). Addressing these problems requires good research and correspondingly well-informed public policy makers. Researchers can assist system and interface designers and public policy makers in addressing these very important questions by investigating real-world issues like faux pas posting and its related factors.

Future research might focus on 1) understanding this study's findings at a deeper level with respect to the influence of friends, gender, and emotional intelligence on posting behavior, 2) studying responses informed by these findings, such as interventions and programs; and 3) studying the way platform design and related technologies relate to these findings. The first area provides a rich area for research. For example, inquiry could be made into why friends are influential on social media, what makes certain friends more influential than others, and how that influence changes over time. Or we might study how the design of social media platforms interacts with factors such as gender and emotional intelligence. Research in the second area could focus on specific interventions and how they work, such as finding ways to use the influence of friends positively. It could examine how gender differences are relevant to different kinds of interventions. This research could find ways to build capacity in emotional intelligence and how this affects faux pas posting behavior. Research in the third area could also look at the problem from a design perspective—for example, finding ways to make apps foster rather than dissuade healthy posting behaviors.

More holistically, future research could examine how societal conditions influence posting behaviors and how to create alternative venues for building popularity. For example, if students are driven to post faux pas content related to a need for popularity, do they have opportunities to interact in other ways? Do they need to be taught social skills that will give them an alternative outlet? They may be “digital natives,” but do they need to be taught face-to-face skills or intentionally be put in situations where they need to apply them?

8. Conclusion

In summary, the negative downstream consequences of faux pas posting make gaining a better understanding of student posting behavior crucial, not only for the educators who teach students but also for the companies that will hire them, as well as for designers and advocates for better platform design. Whether in practical or research settings, this study makes it clear that the influence of friends' online behavior must always be a paramount consideration in this regard. Likewise, the greater tendency of males to make faux pas posts is noteworthy and should be pursued further in both research and professional settings. Finally, it should be remembered that the development of emotional intelligence can be an important defense against potentially career-damaging posting behaviors. Overall, we should recognize the extraordinary reach of social media as a means for individuals to pursue motivations, such as the need for popularity. Helping students prepare for and respond to these realities is crucial, as is advocacy for healthy and humane design. Though more research is needed in these areas, the current study is one step along the path in addressing these needs, within a technological and social environment that will continue to change throughout the lifetimes of today's young adults.

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Appendix I

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
2. What is your age?
3. What is your academic classification?
 - Freshman
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
4. Please indicate how much you agree, or disagree, with the following statements:
 - I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.
 - I have good understanding of my own emotions.
 - I really understand what I feel.
 - I always know whether or not I am happy.
 - I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.
 - I am a good observer of others' emotions.
 - I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.
 - I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.
 - I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.
 - I always tell myself I am a competent person.
 - I am a self-motivated person.
 - I would always encourage myself to try my best.
 - I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.
 - I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.
 - I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.
 - I have good control of my own emotions.
5. Please indicate how much you agree, or disagree, with the following statements:
 - I have done things to make me more popular even when it meant doing something I would not usually do.
 - I've neglected some friends because of what other people might think.
 - At times, I've ignored some people in order to be more popular with others.
 - I'd do almost anything to avoid being seen as a "loser."
 - It's important that people think I'm popular.
 - At times, I've gone out with people just because they were popular.
 - I've bought things because they were the "in" things to have.
 - At times, I've changed the way I dress in order to be more popular.
 - I've been friends with some people just because others liked them.
 - I've gone to parties just to be part of the crowd.
 - I often do things just to be popular with people at school.
 - At times, I've hung out with some people so others wouldn't think I was unpopular.
6. Please think about your account and consider how much you agree with the following statement for each of the listed topics. My account contains a lot of _____.
 - alcohol references
 - drug references
 - sexist comments
 - racial comments
 - gun references

- profanity
 - sexual references
 - political comments
7. Now think about the accounts of your close friends and consider how much you agree with the following statement for each of the listed topics. My close friends have accounts that contain a lot of_____.
- alcohol references
 - drug references
 - sexist comments
 - racial comments
 - gun references
 - profanity
 - sexual references
 - political comments