

Apr 20th, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

# The Motivation to “Like”: Do “Likes” Cause Conformity on Social Media?

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Dolph, Charles D.; Case, Daniel J. Jr.; and Welsh, Devin M., "The Motivation to “Like”: Do “Likes” Cause Conformity on Social Media?" (2016). *The Research and Scholarship Symposium*. 31.

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# The Motivation to “Like”: Do “likes” Cause Conformity on Social Media?

Dr. Charles Dolph; Dan Case; Devin Welsh

## Literature Review

We chose to study the relationship between conformity in social media and its uses in the marketing world because of the fact that most people who are online are on some form of social media (Pew Research Center, 2014).

A study conducted by Cialdini (2004) has already shown the strong effects of conformity on people’s decisions, and the results of his study were confirmed by Yanping and Fishbach’s (2015) more recent study. Because of these studies, and and other similar ones, it was logical to assume that the same principles would apply to the realm of social media interactions.

There has been little research on the topic of conformity in the context of social media, but the studies that have been conducted on conformity in an online context have been quite promising. A study by Dholakia and Soltysinski (2001) showed that there is in fact a strong sense of conformity when it comes to online behavior. And this study, and others conducted by Beran, Drefs, Kaba, Al Baz, and Al Harbi (2015) and Hanson and Putler (1996), suggested that the hypothesis (mentioned below) would be confirmed correct.

## Research Focus

We hypothesized that an individual would be more apt to “like” a picture on social media if it has more “likes” than a post that has less, regardless of the picture’s quality. If the hypothesis was confirmed, it could help those in the online marketing sector better understand the benefits of allocating part of their budget to purchase “likes”, and it should prompt future studies that delve even further into the subject of conformity in online settings.

## Participants

The participants were Cedarville University students who chose to participate in a survey that was announced via an email. In total, 628 individuals took the survey. There were 180 males (29%) and 448 females (71%). Even though 628 individuals began the survey, only 549 completed each question. Each participant was given the opportunity to enter their email address into a drawing for one of five coffee shop gift cards valued at \$4 each.

## Method

A survey on surveymonkey.com was given, which consisted of eight product photos. The products were divided into twelve photo pairs. There was both a high and low quality photo for each product. Each photo was placed into what looked like an Instagram photo box, and the number of “likes” was manipulated on each photo, and the number of “likes” was varied.

In the survey, there were two questions pertaining to demographics, a series of twelve questions consisting of eight different photos in various combinations, and lastly, a place to enter an email address to enter the drawing for the gift card. Once they began, people were instructed to look at each pair of photos and choose the one that they would be more apt to “like” if they were scrolling through an Instagram feed.

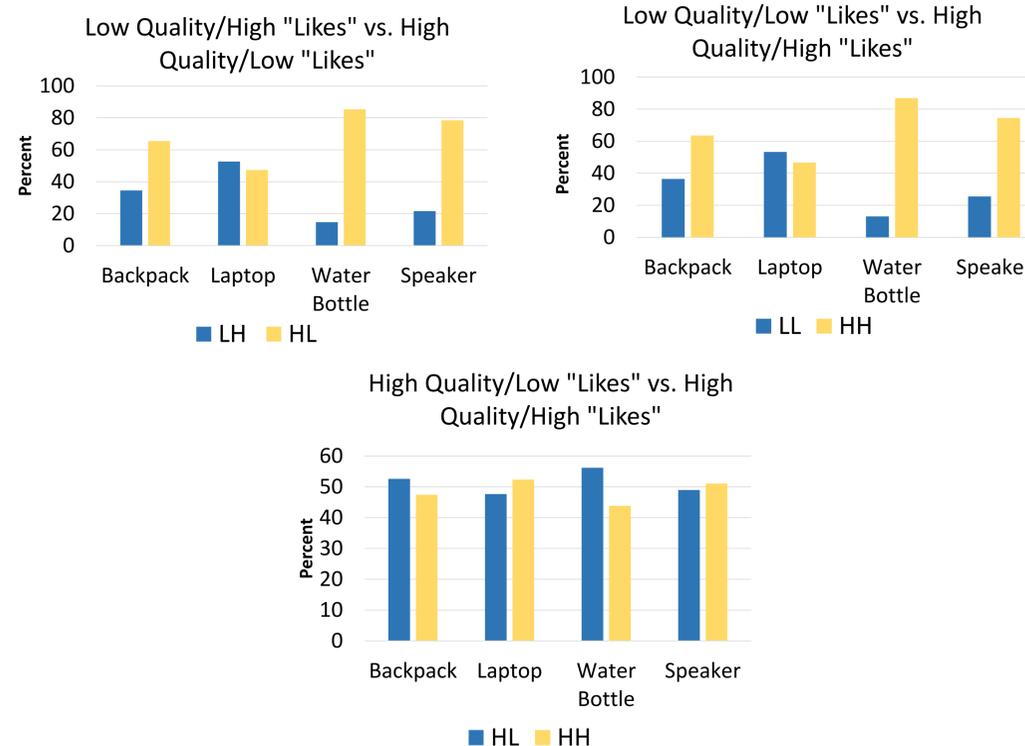


Photo #1



Photo #2

## Results



The Chi-Square goodness of fit tests were conducted to examine whether participants choose significantly more of the pictures which have high number of “likes”.

The results indicate that participants were significantly more likely to choose the high quality/low “likes” pictures than low quality/ high “likes” pictures ( $\chi^2(1) = 53.594, p = .000$ ). They are also significantly more likely to choose high quality/ high “likes” pictures than low quality/ low “likes” pictures ( $\chi^2(1) = 37.565, p = .000$ ). However, they chose about equally when they were shown the high quality/ low “likes” and high quality/ high “likes” picture pairs ( $\chi^2(1) = 1.420, p = .250$ ).

The same results were true for three products (backpack, water bottle, and speaker). However, the participants chose about equally on all the laptop picture pairs regardless of the quality and number of “likes”.

## Conclusion

The data showed that more participants favored pictures that were higher quality, rather than the ones that had a higher number of “likes” associated with the picture. From this information, we concluded that the number of “likes” did not account for a participant selecting a photo. However, there were limitations to our study.

In the future, researchers may want to conduct a study that studies a similar hypothesis but takes into account how to better display the number of “likes” on each post. In our study, many individuals took the survey on a phone, which kept them from even seeing the “likes”, so in the future, it would be helpful for researchers to control for such a variable.

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