

Introduction

- The popularity of social media platforms among young adults suggests that social media is an ever-present and, likely, potent force on college campuses.
- Scant attention has been paid to the ways in which social media contributes directly to the academic experience.
- The current study focuses specifically on social media visibility (e.g., number of Instagram “followers”) and its influence on academic confidence in college students.

We investigated whether social media visibility benefits college students' academic confidence, particularly for students possessing personality characteristics that encourage social behavior and social learning.

Methods

N = 204 college students (132 female, M age = 18.82) were recruited in exchange for course credit.

- Hogan Personality Inventory** (2015; 3 individual scales were used here, including Interpersonal Sensitivity, Sociability, and Social Learning)
- College Self-Efficacy Inventory** (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005),
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1965).
- Participants also provided the number of “followers” on their Instagram and Twitter accounts, and the number of “friends” on their Facebook account, as measures of social media visibility.

Results and Discussion

Nine hierarchical regression models were run to explore the interaction between personality characteristics (3 measures) and social media visibility (3 measures) predicting academic confidence.

- Step 1: sex and age
- Step 2: main effects of one personality variable, one visibility variable, and self-esteem (which served as a control variable)
- Step 3: the interaction between personality and visibility

Two significant interactions emerged.

- Instagram visibility interacted with Interpersonal Sensitivity** (Figure 1; $\beta = .20, p = .009$), such that visibility was associated with lower academic confidence when Interpersonal Sensitivity was low ($\beta = -.37, p = .004$), but not when it was high.
- Facebook visibility interacted with Social Learning** (Figure 2; $\beta = .17, p = .036$), such that visibility predicted higher academic confidence when social learning was high ($\beta = .31, p = .037$), but not when it was low.
- Twitter visibility never interacted with personality**, nor did Sociability ever interact with visibility.

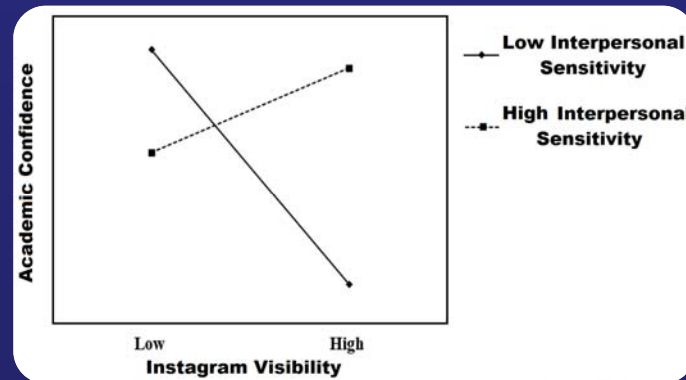


Figure 1. The association between Instagram visibility and academic confidence varies as a function of interpersonal sensitivity.

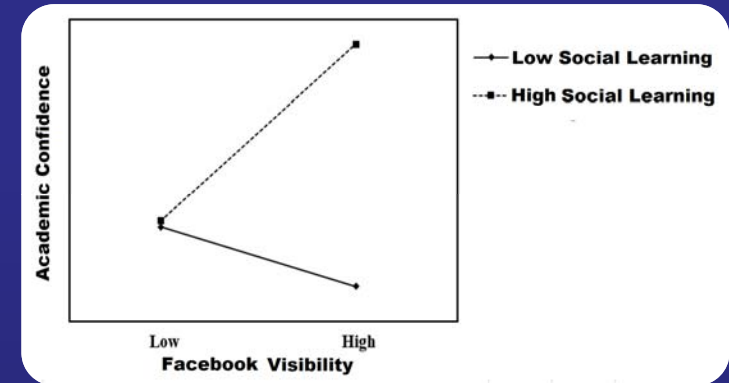


Figure 1. The association between Facebook visibility and academic confidence varies as a function of social learning.

The patterns reported above suggest social media visibility is more likely to benefit some personalities than others. For instance, visibility seems to damage the confidence of students who are cold and tough (low on Interpersonal Sensitivity), but not those who are friendly and warm (high on Interpersonal Sensitivity). On the other hand, Facebook visibility is useful to students who are social learners, but not to students who are hands-on learners. This information may be useful to academic advisors and campus counselors seeking to ignite students' confidence in the academic experience. It is also clear that there are differences between platforms, likely speaking to their different social functions. It should be noted that each of these effects was significant even after accounting for the influence of self-esteem on academic confidence, suggesting that social media plays an important role in the college experience beyond that of traditional measures of self-concept. More research is needed to determine the influence of other potential moderators (or mediators), such as narcissism.