The Power of Positive Conversations:
A Study of College Students' Reactions to Romantic Partners' Instagram Dependence

by
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Abstract

This study examines whether positive or negative talk directly affects Instagram-related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship. The research was conducted through the use of a Qualtrics survey aimed toward understanding how Instagram-addictive personalities and conflict related to jealousy, tracking, and other deceitful behaviors connect with a couple's level of relational satisfaction. Lastly, to gain deeper insights into Instagram-related conflicts, this research wanted to understand whether or not positive talk has a deep correlation with resolving conflict and increasing relational satisfaction. As hypothesized, Instagram does, in fact, have a significant impact on relational satisfaction, especially as it relates to negative conflicts. However, when positive talk is used, results show that relational satisfaction increases.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Power of Positive Talk

This study examines whether positive or negative talk directly affects Instagram-related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship. Over the past decade, Instagram has become one of the main forms of social media-based communication for young adults (Anderson & Auxier, 2021). While Instagram and other forms of social media provide useful tools for connecting people, such as being an aid in maintaining long-distance communication, a tool to support and feel supported, and a way to assist those who may feel social anxiety (Kern, 2016), ultimately, it has created a divide in communication, specifically romantic communication by creating jealousy, monitoring, infidelity, and a lack of quality time between romantic partners (Arikewuyo et al., 2020). This is especially the case when one or both individuals feel a sense of dependence on their Instagram (Bouffard et al., 2021).

When looking at recent data, young adults (18-29) have the highest rates of social media usage with 84 percent saying that they use it regularly (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). With that being said, Instagram places in the top five as young adults' preferred social media platform, and while Instagram was not made to be a dating app, it has become one of the biggest influences on relationships (Dolan, 2021). According to researcher Irum Abassi, not only are young adults more likely to form dependence to their social media, but they are also likely to find infidelity and other relational issues within their romantic relationships because of it (Abassi, 2019, p. 270).

Impact of Instagram Addictive Behavior

Addiction to any social networking site (SNS) can be defined as the act of overusing one's time by consuming SNS due to the "excessive urge" (Kirckcaburun & Griffiths, 2018, p. 159). With more than 500 million daily users, Instagram has become known as one of the most popular forms of social media (Ponnusamy et al., 2020, p. 1). Research has shown that one of the main implications of the continuously growing addiction is the way in which Instagram fulfills specific needs such as recognition, informational needs, and entertainment (Ponnusamy et al., 2020, p. 2). Prior to Instagram, recognition, information, and entertainment may have been discovered in aspects of one's life such as relationships, job success, or research; however, these needs are now being sustained by the popular social media platform. While this may lead some to believe that the needs of individuals are now being met, it has actually done the opposite. Increased use of Instagram and other social networking sites have been linked to higher levels of loneliness, particularly when used to supplement socialization (Ponnusamy et al., 2020, p. 3). There are also links to higher rates of depression, poor sleeping habits, and lower levels of one's overall well-being (Kirckcaburun & Griffiths, 2018, p. 159).

When looking at how addiction affects relationships, previous research has shown repetitively that the increased usage of social media strongly correlates to a decrease in relational satisfaction (Bouffard et al., 2021, p. 1532). It has also been found that heavy SNS use has lowered the quality of some marriages and is linked to thoughts of separation due to feelings of loneliness and lack of connection (Bouffard et al., 2021, p. 1532). These emotions have been found to be rooted in the decreased meaningful interactions between romantic partners (Bouffard et al., 2021, pp. 1532-1533). Due to the

increased use of Instagram and other SNS, couples are now experiencing a decrease in emotional connection leading to strong levels of relational dissatisfaction (Bouffard et al., 2021, p. 1533). With this in mind, this study proposes the following hypothesis, which is stated as:

H1: There is a negative association between the relational partners'
Instagram addiction and perceived relationship satisfaction.

Instagram Induced Conflict

In general, young adults are faced with countless obstacles in their daily lives. Now, with social media being an essential part of today's culture more than ever before, there is an extra layer of concern, especially as it pertains to young adults in romantic relationships. For example, rather than partners seeking validation from one another within their relationship, there is now the added pressure of what validation is given via social media (Bouffard et al. 2021, p. 2). Further studies have shown Instagram dependence is associated with conflicts in romantic relationships, such as significant others monitoring each other's posts or other online activities, feeling jealousy, and cheating on their beloved (Arikewuyo et al., 2020, p. 4). Although these studies have generated plenty of research findings, we still have a limited understanding of how romantic couples talk with each other about their relationship challenges due to social media-based dependence. To state it differently, what happens when couples talk about their problems in an off-line, face-to-face conversation about a social-media-induced relational conflict? The present research shows that generalized statements about Instagram usage being "bad" is not sufficient enough to investigate how Instagram

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dependence affects a romantic relationship. Moving one step further, it is important to examine how romantic couples manage and approach their conversations after they experience a social-media-related conflict. With this in mind, this study proposes the following hypothesis, which is stated as:

H2: There is a negative association between relational conflict (jealousy, tracking, deceitful behaviors), and perceived relational satisfaction.

Positive vs. Negative Internal Dialogue

When following this research, the terms positive talk and negative talk originate from the communication phenomenon of "self-talk." Self-talk can be defined as internal or external dialogue (or intra-communication) with oneself (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). Research has found that self-talk has a strong correlation with how individuals regulate their behavior (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). One example of this would be an individual who experiences social anxiety; research has shown that they may experience increased levels of negative self-talk compared to others (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017).

Previous research on negative self-talk has also found that there are four functions of self-talk (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). Its first function is labeled as self-criticism; this can be seen when an individual feels they have done something wrong (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). Another level of self-talk would be self-reinforcement, in which individuals feel proud of themselves or an event that has happened to them (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). The next step is known as self-management, which is when one must figure out their next vocal action (Shi, Brinthaupt

& McCree, 2017). The last measurement is known as social assessment, which is when an individual takes into account how others respond to their actions (Shi, Brinthaupt & McCree, 2017). With these four aspects in mind, positive and negative talk shows self-talk in a new light. Rather than evaluating interactions with oneself, this study aims to understand how an individual's mindset can then go on to affect another person within an Instagram-related conflict. To put it differently, understanding how self-talk affects an individual, either positively or negatively, may assist in understanding how their internal and external ability to handle conflict affects their mode of communication. For example, if one has a negative view of themselves, their partner, or their actions, they may react to conflict negatively, resulting in negative communication, which would create negative talk. However, the opposite may be said if an individual feels positive about themselves, their partner, or their actions, which would then translate to positive communication, creating positive talk.

Positive vs. Negative Problem-Solving Approach

According to researchers Marina Delatorre, Adriana Wagner, and Lívia Bedin, the more agreeable and conscientious a couple is when approaching conflict-management strategies, the more sustainable the relationship will be (Delatorre et al., 2021, p. 210). This is because the romantic duo is able to regulate positive emotional strategies such as acceptance, problem-solving, and listening (Delatorre et al., 2021, p. 210). When applying these different principles of conflict to Instagram-related turbulence, one can begin to infer that the more frequent and positive the communication approach is, the more likely partners will respect each other's wishes and concerns, which will result in a

long-term and productive relationship. The same can be said for the opposite form of communication. When partners approach Instagram-related conflicts negatively, that is when couples may start to feel attacked and respond in a manner that will result in a short and poor-satisfaction relationship. According to Delatorre, Wagner, and Bedin, conflict management strategies such as defensiveness, avoidance, and ruminating contribute to extremely low satisfaction levels within close relationships (Delatorre et al., 2021, p. 210).

Positive vs. Negative Verbal and Nonverbal Expression

There are several ways in which couples may approach problem-solving situations; however, general attempts at problem-solving can be defined as positive communication or negative communication (Overall et al., 2009, p. 621). Negative communication behaviors include actions such as "put-downs, blaming, displays of negative affect" (Overall et al., 2009, p. 621). Positive communication, the powerful and aspirational form of communication for which every couple should strive, can be defined as "reasoning, problem-solving, displays of positive affect, partner support" (Overall et al., 2009, p. 621). Studies have shown that when negative communication strategies are used, they prove to be ineffective and strain the success of the relationship (Overall et al., 2009, p. 635). However, when positive communication strategies are used, there is a significant increase in the desired actions of both the partner and the relationship (Overall et al., 2009, p. 635).

Taken together, the present study proposes that there are three distinct lines of literature associated with romantic couples' conflict management, including (1) positive

vs. negative self-talk, (2) positive vs. negative problem-solving approach, and (3) positive vs. negative verbal and nonverbal expressions during conflict interaction. No prior research, however, has examined how these three dimensions of conflict management behavior influence social-media-induced conflict situations. This study argues that these three dimensions exemplify a more holistic view of effective interpersonal conflict resolution. Indeed, this study defines *positive talk* as a communicative interaction process in which a romantic partner intentionally regulates one's positive self-talk, engages with one's partner for a joint problem-solving attitude, and strategically displays positive verbal and nonverbal expressions in order to create a positive communication climate during conflict situations. As no prior research has examined these three dimensions collectively as "positive talk," the present study raises the following hypothesis:

> *H3*: After other relevant factors of Instagram-induced conflicts are statically controlled, romantic couples' positive talk frequency will exert a positive influence on relationship satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

Methodology: Surveying Students About Instagram Conflict

Participants

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Middle Tennessee State University, the author started to collect data, which lasted six months during the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023. The study was completed by using an anonymous survey. Participants were recruited via snowballing, which is the process of one participant sending the survey to another potential participant, and so forth. All Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) students were qualified to participate in the study. Student organizations such as Fraternity Sorority Life (FSL) were contacted to take the anonymous survey. Specific colleges were also contacted to send out the survey to their designated departments and students, which include the College of Liberal Arts and the Honors College. In terms of where and how the survey was conducted, potential students were contacted through various forms of media. Contacts include but were not limited to, email, text, D2L course walls and announcements, and various forms of social media such as Instagram and Snapchat. Once a link was sent to the potential participant and they clicked on it, they were immediately taken to the Qualtrics survey. To ensure the validity of the response, instructions state that the participants must meet and agree to the following criteria: they (a) must be 18 years or older, (b) be a currently enrolled MTSU student, and (c) understand and agree to procedures and potential risks. If a student did not meet these criteria, he or she could continue with the survey to enhance their self-reflection, however, their responses were not considered in the evaluation.

Demographics

  A total of 125 participants completed the survey. However, there was less than 5% random missing data in some measurements due to nonresponse. SPSS multiple imputation (MI) method was used to replace missing data in order to maintain the sample size. Based on the current data patterns of participant responses to different survey items, SPSS replaces a missing value that is most representative of the individual's response pattern through probability judgment. As a result, the current analysis is based on the data set after the random missing information is replaced.

  The majority of participants were female, making up 67% of participation, followed by males at 17%, MI of 14%, and nonbinary at 2%. Most participants classified themselves as being in the age range of 18-21, which constituted 55% of the participation sample. The second most common age range was 22-24, at 19%, followed by MI of 15%, and lastly, ages 25-28 constituting 11% of the sample. Participants were able to choose to answer questions with either a past or present relationship in mind. The majority of participants stated present relationship, making up 94% of the population, followed by past relationship, which were 49%. When looking at present relationship length, the general majority was 2+ years, which made up 33% of responses. Following that, 23% stated they had been with their romantic partner for 6-11 months, 22% stated 1-5 months, 20% for one year, and MI was 3%. When looking at responses using past relationships, the majority said that they had been broken up for 1-11 months, which was 44% of the sample. 3+ years and 1 year were tied at 22%, and the least amount was 2 years, which only made up 12% of the population. The majority of participants revealed that they have been a user of Instagram for 4-6+ years making up 85% of participation. Of the survey

takers, 10% stated they have had Instagram for 2-4 years, 4% for 1-11 months, and 2% for 1-2 years. When reporting on how often one finds themselves, on a daily basis, being on Instagram, 55% stated 1-2 hours, 32% 2-4 hours, 7% 4-6 hours, and 6% 7-8 hours plus. When asked how often they find/ found their partner using Instagram, the majority (44%) stated 1-2 hours, 35% said 2-4 hours, 11% stated that their partner never uses Instagram, 9% 4-6 hours, and .8% reported they used Instagram for 7-8 hours plus. See table 1:

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics (M, SD) and Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Instagram Length	1	-.29 ***	-.22*	-.10	.011	.13	.09
2. Self Daily Instagram Usage		1	.15	-.010	-.009	-.022	-.03
3. Partner Daily Instagram Usage			1	-.112	-.13	-.097	-.153
4. Instagram Tracking				1	.39**	.015	-.23*
5. Instagram-related Conflict					1	.08	-.244**
6. Positive Talk						1	.33**
7. Relational Satisfaction							1
M	3.8	1.7	2.00	1.7719	3.6130	3.5909	4.5473
SD	.680	1.019	1.257	.76781	2.17227	.61512	1.41505

*** $p< .001$; ** $p< .01$; * $p< .05$

Procedure

  Once participants logged onto the survey website, they were met with a welcome statement introducing the primary researcher and the reason for the project. Soon after, they were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation and the purpose of the study, which stated, "The purpose of this study is to examine whether positive or negative conversations directly affect Instagram-related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship." Next, participants went on to complete the following five sections of the questionnaire, including (1) Instagram dependency and tracking, (2) Instagram-induced conflict experience, (3) positive talk measurement, (4) relationship satisfaction, and (5) demographic information.

Instagram Dependency Measurement

  The goal of section one of the survey was to gather relationship demographics as well as Instagram use. Section one required participants to reflect on a past or present relationship while answering the questions. This way, participation was not limited to only individuals that were in a relationship and vice versa. Question two then asked how long the couple had either been together or separated. Once this was understood, participants answered how long their partner and themselves have had Instagram and how often it is used. Next, section one went into greater depth about monitoring their relationship as it related to Instagram usage. Questions revolved around asking how often individuals found themselves searching for undesirable actions. Such searching may have included checking their partner's follower list, looking at the posts partners liked, their partner's comment section, or even their partner's search history. A sample item stated,

"How often do/did you have arguments with your partner about whom your partner interacts with on Instagram?" Results were based on a scale of 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, or 5 = very often.

Social Media-induced Conflict Scale

The goal of section two was to offer a series of questions related to possible topics of Instagram-related conflict. Participants were asked to reflect on their past or current relationships and read through the six written statements. One example of the statements in the survey was, "Having the feeling or discovering that my partner may be talking to other people in a sexual or romantic way on Instagram behind my back." After reading through the statements, participants could base their answers on a scale of 0-10 (0 = no conflict, 5 = moderate level of conflict, and 10 = intense conflict).

Positive Talk in Conversation Measurement

Section three of the survey aimed to understand the participant's emotional regulation and the extent to which they use positive talk strategies during an Instagram-related conflict with their partner. It asked participants questions regarding what level of emotional management strategies are applied during a disagreement. This section measured three dimensions of positive talk, including (1) emotional regulation (sample item, "When I want to feel positive emotions [such as joy or amusement], I change what I'm thinking about and act on it") (Gross and John, 2003), (2) reframing conflict (sample item, "I try to see conflict as an opportunity to learn and develop the relationship") (J. Latack, 1986), and (3) cognitive planning (sample item, "I try to think ahead about the

challenges I may encounter in conflict") (J. Latack, 1986). These questions were answered through the scale method from 1-5 (1= rarely or never, 5 = very often).

Relational Qualities Measurement

The goal of section four was to understand how participants felt about their relationship once they had a conversation after the Instagram-related conflict. This section of the survey aimed to look for relationship satisfaction, specifically discovering if one felt positive or negative emotions toward a partner's post-conflict-related talk. A sample item stated, "The current status of this relationship is bright and exciting" (1= completely or almost completely uncertain, 4+ = slightly more certain than uncertain, 6 = completely or almost completely certain).

Demographics

Section five aimed to receive answers about the participant's demographic. Survey Takers were asked about their age, gender, ethnicity, and college year. The data collected from this section were used to better understand and predict how Instagram-related conflict affects the individuals in the relationship, for example, male versus female.

CHAPTER III

Analysis: Healing Relationships

Results

   Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test hypotheses *H1-H3*. Specifically, regression analysis was conducted with relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable (Y). Participants' age, sex (1= male, 2 = female), relationship length, and Instagram partner usage were all entered at step one as control variables. Instagram-additive behavior was entered in step two, Instagram-related conflict was entered in step three, followed by positive talk in step four. Results were reported in Table 2 (see Appendix E).

   Results reveal that age and gender of participants do not have a statistically significant impact on the participants' feelings of relational satisfaction. In other words, relational partners' age and gender cannot predict relationship satisfaction.

   In the second step of the regression analysis, results show that Instagram's addictive behavior negatively and significantly impacts relationship satisfaction, $\beta = -.25$, $p = .004$. In the third step, after participants' age, sex, and Instagram addictive behavior were controlled, regression results revealed that relational conflict created an additional negative and significant effect on relational satisfaction ($\beta = .18$, $p = .06$). As these results showed, Instagram-addictive behavior and relational conflict were found to be inversely related with relational satisfaction. These results are consistent with the speculations of Hypotheses 1 and 2. As such, *H1* and *H2* are supported.

On the other hand, however, when positive talk was introduced in the fourth and final step, results revealed new findings about how positive talk is the key ingredient for happy relations. Over and above the negative impacts of Instagram addiction and relational conflicts in relational satisfaction, positive talk accounts for a significant portion of the variations of relational satisfaction ($\beta = .31$, $p = .000$, $\Delta R^2 = 10$). Put differently, while social-media-addictive behavior and Instagram-induced relational conflict may attribute to relational dissatisfaction, positive talk in managing relational problems can operate as a strong, positive counter force in cultivating a satisfying relationship. This part of the findings support the hypothesis that the power of positive talk can repair relational problems, or further "boost" relationship satisfaction, despite the adverse effects of social-media conflict. This repair and boost result is consistent with what is expected in Hypothesis 3. Therefore, *H3* is supported.

As a post hoc analysis, the author examined written responses from the participants. Content analysis revealed some additional insights on Instagram-related conflict. To get specific examples of this form of conflict (jealousy, tracking, deceitful behaviors, addictive behaviors, etc.) participants were allowed to share a personal experience anonymously. Participants written responses are split up below into four different conflict areas:

Tracking

Tracking on Instagram can be done in countless ways. Some examples may include checking whom their partner follows, the pictures their partner likes, or even the names their partner searches for (Areaway, Lasisi, et al., 2020, p. 7). As one participant

wrote, "Seeing my partner tagged in photos by particular people" was a cause for conflict within their relationship. Another individual (participant 87) wrote that they and their partner have had conflict related to "Who he follows, while I have completely cleaned out all of my past from every social media form." Both of these comments are examples of tracking, because these individuals are purposefully searching for specific behavior in their partner as it relates to what the partners are doing on Instagram, leading to experiencing some form of conflict.

Instagram Addiction

Instagram addiction can look like a wide variety of behaviors but are most commonly classified by the following: (a) a person obsessively checking Instagram even when they are doing interpersonal activities such as spending time with others; (b) an individual's mood is directly correlated to the amount of time spent on the platform and; (c) an individual must continue to increase their time in Instagram use to continue getting satisfaction (Ardinana & Tumanggor, 2020, p. 290). As participant 95 wrote, "They look at Instagram more than they look at me. I know this by them sending me stuff/ tagging me in pictures." This is a direct example of Instagram addiction, as it describes an individual spending more time looking at the contents of their Instagram and sharing it with their partner rather than being in the present moment. Another example of this behavior was written by participant 92, who states "My biggest conflict is that he gets distracted with Instagram and isn't present when we're together, but I trust what he's watching." While this partnership has the positive attribute of trust, there is still the issue

of how much time they are spending on Instagram rather than being in the moment together.

Jealousy

Jealousy in relationships can be due to emotions such as the lack of security or the trust one feels with their partner (Arikewuyo, Lasisi et al., 2020, p. 8). Jealousy can especially be present when one does not feel as though they can compare to another. As participant 42 wrote, "My ex used to follow Playboy on Instagram which did not cause any conflict but internally I did not love it (like a 3 on the scale)." This statement is an example of an Instagram-related conflict specifically as a result of jealousy because it shows the internal struggle they were feeling within themselves. While this individual may not have had an outward conflict with their partner, it still caused relational dissatisfaction.

Deceitful Behaviors

Depending on relational expectations, deceitful behaviors can vary. Traditionally, these behaviors include any action purposefully unknown or hidden from one's partner such as sexual communication or interaction with another individual (Arikewuyo, Lasisi et al., 2020, p. 3). As participant 116 expressed, "Conflict has arisen due to my partner lying about why he followed a person whose content is mostly sexual." This is an example of conflict related to deceitful behaviors because their partner is purposefully hiding information from them related to their sexual desires. Participant 102 wrote that their partner was "Talking to her ex over Instagram." While this does not state anything

directly about sexual infidelity, their partner has still taken action behind their back.

Another example of deceit would be what participant 34 wrote: "My ex dmed his ex-girlfriend to try and get together with her behind my back."

Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to examine whether positive or negative talk directly affects Instagram-related conflict resolution in romantic relationships. To discover Instagram's impact, research questions were split up into three different areas: (a) relational satisfaction concerning Instagram addiction, (b) relational satisfaction as it concerns Instagram-conflict, and, (c) how Instagram-related conflicts were handled and relational satisfaction changed when positive talk was used as a form of conflict management. One of the most significant findings of this study is about an individual's positive talk behavior. After social media addiction and conflicts have been statistically controlled meaning these factors were held constant those individuals who use positive talk communication show greater happiness in their relationships. What this means is that although social media-induced conflicts are experienced by all participants, those individuals who utilize the art of positive talk reported a higher degree of relational satisfaction than did those who do not use positive talk often, or at all. Therefore, positive talk in conversations matters significantly in determining whether a couple has a relationship quality that is satisfying.

Looking at research question one, when reflecting on how Instagram addiction affects a couple's relational satisfaction, this research learned that there is a strong correlation between the use of Instagram and the level of happiness one feels within their

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relationship. When measuring the level of Instagram addiction one experiences, the study took note of the individual and their partner's usage of Instagram (how much time is spent on the app daily and how long an individual/partner has had the app in general). It is important to note that these findings directly align with existing research demonstrating that Instagram continues to be a contributing factor toward relational dissatisfaction when used in an unhealthy manner. Interestingly, research question one directly correlates with relational satisfaction related to Instagram-related conflict. Results found that the two were inversely related, meaning that they go hand in hand when creating relational satisfaction.

This study did however contradict previous research about whether or not age has a strong correlation with Instagram-addictive behaviors. While some studies have shown that there is a connection, this particular study did not find that correlation to be true.

Lastly, and most importantly, using practices of positive talk during conflict significantly boosts relational satisfaction. While there is continual indication that Instagram disrupts relationships, there is still a chance for a couple to recover and come closer when conflict is handled productively. To state this differently, this means that when an individual can reframe a situation and their attitude about it and effectively understand the importance of the relationship with their partner, the couple is more likely to have a productive and positive conversation, which will then generate solutions, growth, and ultimately relational satisfaction. In opposition, when a couple approaches conflict with only one person's best interest in mind, attacking the other partner and communicating negative words and actions, the relationship will likely suffer and ultimately end.

Limits and Future Research

      The following research was done for undergraduate purposes, meaning that in order to save time and utilize the materials available, only one form of observation (survey) was used to generate results. However, when assessing the research that was done, more valuable information could have been collected by interviewing participants about their conflict experiences and the manner in which their conflicts are resolved. While the results gathered are extremely valuable to the study, I challenge future researchers to try and reach a larger sample of study participants, to see if increased numbers support the results in an even stronger capacity.

Conclusions

This study discovered several components to Instagram-related conflict. To begin, the more an individual and/or partner feels drawn to use their Instagram in an unhealthy manner, the more likely conflict will arise. Instagram addiction directly inflames one's emotions of jealousy, tracking and other deceitful behaviors, which also connects to higher levels of conflict. The results of this study offer a solution, which is to approach Instagram-related conflict with positive talk. When reframing conflict in a positive light rather than a negative one, positive talk helps both individuals in a relationship feel understood, valued, and ultimately brings them together rather than pushing them apart.

Relational conflicts can occur at any stage of a relationship. While many individuals try to avoid conflict, this study proves that conflict should not be feared, instead, how conflict is managed should be the focus. Instagram is one of many conflicts a couple might experience; however, regardless of how minor or grand an argument is, there is still some form of lasting impact on relational satisfaction. When negative forms of communication are used during an argument, the relationship will likely take a negative turn. In opposition, if positive forms of communication and positive talk are used, the couple will likely gain a deeper understanding of each other and bring the pair closer together.

Above all, this study severs as a reminder to its readers that conflict is part of the relational process. Without conflict, there can be no relational growth. Understandably with social media being a big part of today's culture, especially for young adults, it is easy for individuals to compare their relationships to others and create a false narrative of what a healthy relationship should look like. Conflict should be a part of that narrative

but it should be understood that the conflict must be done positively. Even more so, this study can be taken further than Instagram-related conflicts. In any conflict and in any relationship, using positive talk can benefit the longevity of the relationship at hand. As nerve wrecking as it may be to some, when the value of a couple's relationship is held to the upmost respect, positive forms of conflict should not be the thing that ruins the relationship. When a partner's value of the relationship does not match each other's and negative communication is made, issues may arise. Romantic relationships and other relationships can be difficult; however, when individuals know how to handle conflict in a positive way, long-term prosperity will likely occur.

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    intimate relationships: The costs and benefits of different communication
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    critical, self-managing, and social-assessing self-talk on performance outcomes in
    a public speaking context. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, *36*(4), 356-
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Appendix A. Survey and Consent

Introduction

Welcome to my survey! My name is Alexandra Spadafino and I am a senior here at MTSU! The survey you are about to take will help me achieve my honors thesis! I look forward to reading your responses!

Let's get started!

Intro Block

Section Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine whether positive or negative conversations directly affect Instagram-related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship.

Description: There are several parts to this project. They are:

- **You must be an enrolled student at Middle Tennessee State University in order to participate.**
- You will be asked to provide some simple demographic information about yourself.
- You will NOT be audio recorded or videotaped in this study.
- This is an anonymous online study. Your name will not be collected.
- You will receive this survey via email, text, or through various forms of social media such as but not limited to Instagram stories, Facebook wall posts, or Twitter.
- Once a participant receives the survey, If consent is accepted, they will complete a 15-20 minute survey that will ask a series of questions regarding a past or present relationship. These questions will be centered around the participant and their current or ex-partner's Instagram usage, the possible conflict that may have/ has risen as a result of Instagram usage, and lastly, the outcome of the conflict and the relational satisfaction that they have with that partner.
- Once the participant has completed the survey, they will see a brief "thank you" on the screen and will be prompted to exit the page. All results will confidentially be sent to myself the head researcher, Alexandra Spadafino, and co-researcher Dr. Shi.

Duration: The entire study will take 15-20 minutes.

IRB details:
Primary Investigator: Alexandra Spadafino
PI Department & College: Communication, College of Liberal Arts

Faculty Advisor (if PI is a student): Xiaowei Shi, Ph.D.

Protocol Title: Power of Positive Talk: A study on College Students' Reactions to Romantic Partners' Instagram Dependence

Protocol ID: 22-1138 2q   Approval Date: 04/22/2022   Expiration Date: 04/30/2023

Here are your rights as a participant:

- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You may skip any item that you don't want to answer, and you may stop the experiment at any time (but see the note below)
- If you leave an item blank by either not clicking or entering a response, you may be warned that you missed one, just in case it was an accident. But you can continue the study without entering a response if you didn't want to answer any questions.

Risks & Discomforts: We do not anticipate that you will experience any discomforts from participating in this study beyond those ordinarily encountered in daily life or when performing routine physical or psychological tasks.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, we hope that, by participating in this project, you will gain some insight and understanding about our research topic on positive conversation over social-media induced conflicts.

Identifiable Information: No identified information will be gathered.

Compensation: The participants will not be compensated.

Compensation Requirements:

- *The qualifications to participate in this research are: To be at least 18 years of age. If you do not meet these qualifications, you will not be included in the research and you will not be compensated.*
- *Please do not participate in this research more than once. Multiple attempts to participate will not result in multiple lottery entries.*
- *After you complete this consent form you will answer screening questions. If you fail to qualify for the research based on these questions, the research will end, and you will not be compensated.*

Confidentiality: All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, *if* you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact Dr. Xiaowei Shi, at Xiaowei.Shi@mtsu.edu or by telephone at (765)-409-5788. You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615)-494-8918 or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu). This contact information will be presented again at the end of the experiment.

You are not required to do anything additional if you decide not to participate; just close your browser. Please continue and answer the questions below if you wish to enroll.

Thanks again for volunteering your time to this project!

○ After reading the content form, I decide to participate in this study.
○ After reading the consent form, I decide not to participate in this study.

Introduction Block pt. 2

I confirm I am 18 years or older

○ Yes
○ No

I confirm that I am an enrolled student at Middle Tennessee State University.

○ Yes
○ No

I have read this informed consent document pertaining to the above-identified research.

○ Yes
○ No

The research procedures to be conducted are clear to me.

○ Yes
○ No

I am aware of the potential risks of the study.

○ Yes
○ No

By clicking below, I affirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study. I understand I can withdraw from this study at any time without facing any consequences.

○ Yes
○ No

Section 1: Dependency

When answering the following survey questions, will you be referring to a past or present romantic relationship?

○ Past
○ Present

If you are answering these questions using a past romantic relationship, around how long have you been separated.

○ 1-11 Months
○ 1 year
○ 2 years
○ 3+ years
○ N/A

If you answered present, how long have you and your partner been dating?

○ 1-5 months

○ 6-11 months

○ 1 year

○ 2+ years

○ N/A

For how long have you been a user of Instagram?

○ 1-11 months

○ 1-2 years

○ 2-4 years

○ 4-6 years +

How often do you find yourself using Instagram per day?

○ 1-2 hours

○ 2-4 hours

○ 4-6 hours

○ 7-8 hours+

○ Never

How often do/did you find your partner using Instagram?

○ 1-2 hours

○ 2-4 hours

○ 4-6 hours

○ 7-8 hours +

○ Never

Look back on your past or present relationship that you have in mind. After careful reflection, answer the following questions regarding Instagram related behavior to the best of your ability.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
How often do/did you find yourself checking who is following your partner on Instagram?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you find yourself checking who your partner is following on Instagram?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you find yourself checking what pictures your partner is liking on Instagram?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you find yourself checking your partner's Instagram direct messages?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you find yourself checking your partner's Instagram comments?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you have arguments with your partner about who your partner interacts with on Instagram?	O	O	O	O	O
How often do/did you check your partner's Instagram search history?	O	O	O	O	O

Section 2: Conflict of Issues

Listed below are possible topics of conflict you and your current or ex partner may have experienced in the past related to Instagram usage.

Below is a slider scale for you to describe the level of conflict. 0= no conflict, 5 = moderate level of conflict, 10= intense conflict.

31

	Disagree										Agree
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(1) Seeing my partner like a picture of someone or something that made me feel jealous or insecure.											☐
(2) Seeing my partner comment on another persons post that made me feel jealous or insecure.											☐
(3) Having the feeling or discovering that my partner may be talking to other people in a sexual or romantic way on Instagram behind my back.											☐
(4) Having the feeling or discovering that my partner is looking at other Instagram users pictures or profiles in a sexual or romantic way											☐
(5) Having the feeling or discovering that my partner is in communication with someone on Instagram that I view as a threat to the betterment of the relationship.											☐

If you have other Instagram related conflict experiences, feel free to express below. 1-2 sentences will be sufficient enough.

☐

Section 3: Display of Emotion In Conflict

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In the following section, there will be questions about your emotional experience in the conflict talk with your current or ex partner, in particular, how often you use the following kinds of emotional management strategies. Please keep your specific relational problem in mind when you respond to the following statements. Please take your time and think carefully about each item. Use the following scale to rate each item

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
(1) When I want to feel positive emotions (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about and act on it. (Gross and John, 2003).	O	O	O	O	O
(2) When I'm faced with a stressful situation with my partner, I try to talk with my partner about it in a way that will ease up the tension. (Gross and John, 2003).	O	O	O	O	O
(3) I control my emotions so that I can keep my partner and me from being too angry or worried about a certain issue.	O	O	O	O	O
(4) I try to reframe the situation in a new light (tension vs. a new trial).	O	O	O	O	O
(5) I try to see conflict as an opportunity learn and develop the relationship (j. Latack, 1986).	O	O	O	O	O
(6) I try to think ahead about the challenges I may encounter in conflict (j. Latack, 1986).	O	O	O	O	O
(7) I tell myself that I can probably work thing out.	O	O	O	O	O

Section 4: Relational Qualities

In this section, we are interested in knowing how you feel about your current or past relationship post conflict with your partner.

1= Completely or almost completely uncertain, 4+ slightly more certain than uncertain, 6=completely or almost completely certain.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) How committed is your partner to the relationship?	○	○	○	○	○	○
(2) How much is your partner romantically interested in you?	○	○	○	○	○	○
(3) I feel confident in future of the relationship.	○	○	○	○	○	○
(4) The current status of this relationship is bright and exciting.	○	○	○	○	○	○
(5) My partner and I have equal feelings for one another.	○	○	○	○	○	○

Section 5: Demographics

How old are you?

○ 18-21
○ 22-24
○ 25-28

Ethnicity

[   ]

Gender

[   ]

College Year

○ Freshman

○ Sophomore

○ Junior

○ Senior

No participation block

Thank you for considering this survey! As you choose not to participate, you can exit it by clicking next.

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix B. IRB Approval Form

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn.. 0003571

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Friday, April 22, 2022

Protocol Title	***The Power of Positive Conversations: A Study on College Students' Reactions to Romantic Partners' Instagram Dependence***
Protocol ID	**22-1138 2q**

Principal Investigator	**Alexandra Spadafino** (Student)　　*Faculty Advisor:* Xiaowei Shi
Co-Investigators	NONE
Investigator Email(s)	*acs90r2@mtmail.mtsu.edu; xiaowei.shi@mtsu.edu*
Department/Affiliation	Communication Studies

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category *(2) Educational Tests, surveys, interviews or observations of public behavior (Qualtrics Survey).* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars of this protocol are shown below:

IRB Action	**EXEMPT from further IRB Review** Exempt from further continuing review but other oversight requirements apply
Date of Expiration	<mark>**4/30/2023**</mark>　　*Date of Approval:* **4/22/22**　　*Recent Amendment:* **NONE**
Sample Size	TWO HUNDRED (200)
Participant Pool	**Healthy adults (18 or older) – College/University Students**
Exceptions	Online consent followed by internet-based survey using Qualtrics is permitted (Qualtrics links on file).
Type of Interaction	☐ Non-interventional or Data Analysis ☒ Virtual/Remote/Online Interview/survey ☐ In person or physical– Mandatory COVID-19 Management (refer next page)
Mandatory Restrictions	**1. All restrictions for exemption apply.** **2. The participants must be 18 years or older.** **3. Mandatory ACTIVE informed consent.** **4. Identifiable information, such as, names, addresses, and voice/video data, must not be obtained.** **5. NOT approved for in-person data collection.**
Approved IRB Templates	*IRB Templates:* Recruitment Email and Online Informed Consent *Non-MTSU Templates:* Recruitment Script(s)
Research Inducement	NONE
Comments	NONE

Summary of the Post-approval Requirements: The PI and FA must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer "*Quick Links*" in the bottom):

- *Final Report:* The Faculty Advisor (FA) is responsible for submitting a final report to close-out this protocol before 4/30/2023; if more time is needed to complete the data collection, the FA must request an extension by email. <u>REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT</u>. **Failure to close-out (or request extension) may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol or withholding student diploma.
- *Protocol Amendments*: IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as:
    - Addition/removal of subject population and sample size.
    - Change in investigators.
    - Changes to the research sites – appropriate permission letter(s) from may be needed.
    - Alternation to funding.
    - Amendments must be clearly described in an addendum request form submitted by the FA.
    - The proposed change must be consistent with the approved protocol and they must comply with exemption requirements.
- *Reporting Adverse Events:* Research-related injuries to the participants and other events , such as, deviations & misconduct, must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu.
- *Research Participant Compensation:* Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Exempt protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- *COVID-19:* Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

COVID-19 Management:

The FA must enforce social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an "adverse event."
- The FA must enforce the MTSU's "Return-to-work" questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled and signed by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **FA's Responsibility:** The FA is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the FA must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the PI will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would not result in the cancellation of the protocol's eligibility for exemption. *Only THREE procedural amendments will be entertained per year (changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).*

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Post-approval IRB Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Mandatory Data Storage Requirement:

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additionally,

the Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" below for policy 129*). Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects. **The IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this notice**. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
- Post-approval Responsibilities: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php
- Exemption Procedures: https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExemptPaperWork.php
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php

Appendix C. IRB Approved Informed Consent

Information and Disclosure Section

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine whether positive or negative conversations directly affect Instagram related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship.

Description: There are several parts to this project. They are:

- You will be asked to provide some simple demographic information about yourself.
- You will NOT be audio recorded or videotaped in this study.
- This is an anonymous online study. Your name will not be collected.
- You will receive this survey via email, text, or through various forms of social media such as but not limited to Instagram stories, Facebook wall post, or Twitter.
- Once a participant receives the survey, If consent is accepted, they will complete a 15-20 minute survey that will ask series of questions regarding a past or present relationship. These questions will be centered around the participant and their current or ex partner's Instagram usage, possible conflict that may have/ has risen as a result of Instagram usage and lastly, the outcome of the conflict and your relational satisfaction that they have with that partner.
- Once participant has completed survey, they will see a brief "thank you" on the screen and will be prompted to exit the page. All results will confidentially be sent to myself the head researcher, Alexandra Spadafino and co- researcher Dr. Shi.

Duration: The entire study will take 15-20 minutes.

IRB details:
Primary Investigator: Alexandra Spadafino
PI Department & College: Communication, College of Liberal Arts
Faculty Advisor (if PI is a student): Xiaowei Shi, Ph.D.
Protocol Title: Power of Positive Talk: A study on College Students' Reactions to Romantic Partners' Instagram Dependence
Protocol ID: 22-1138 2q   Approval Date: 04/22/2022   Expiration Date: 08/31/2023

Here are your rights as a participant:

- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You may skip any item that you don't want to answer, and you may stop the experiment at any time (but see the note below)
- If you leave an item blank by either not clicking or entering a response, you may be warned that you missed one, just in case it was an accident. But you can continue the study without entering a response if you didn't want to answer any questions.

Risks & Discomforts: We do not anticipate that you will experience any discomforts from participating in this study beyond those ordinarily encountered in daily life or when performing routine physical or psychological tasks.

Benefits: There is no direct benefits to you. However, we hope that, by participating in this project, you will gain some insight and understanding about our research topic on positive conversation over social-media induced conflicts.

Identifiable Information: No identified information will be gathered.
Compensation: The participants will not be compensated.

Compensation Requirements:

- *The qualifications to participate in this research are: To be at least 18 years of age. If you do not meet these qualifications, you will not be included in the research and you will not be compensated.*
- *Please do not participate in this research more than once. Multiple attempts to participate will not result in multiple lottery entries.*
- *After you complete this consent form you will answer screening questions. If you fail to qualify for the research based on these questions, the research will end, and you will not be compensated.*

Confidentiality: All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, *if* you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact Dr. Xiaowei Shi, at Xiaowei.Shi@mtsu.edu or by telephone at (765)-409-5788. You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615)-494-8918 or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu). This contact information will be presented again at the end of the experiment.

You are not required to do anything additional if you decide not to participate; just close your browser. Please continue and answer the questions below if you wish to enroll.

Thanks again for volunteering your time to this project!

Participant Response Section

☐No ☐Yes I have read this informed consent document pertaining to the above identified research
☐No ☐Yes The research procedures to be conducted are clear to me
☐No ☐Yes I confirm I am 18 years or older
☐No ☐Yes I am aware of the potential risks of the study

By clicking below, I affirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study. I understand I can withdraw from this study at any time without facing any consequences.
      ☐ NO I do not consent
      ☐ Yes I consent

Appendix D. IRB Approved Recruitment Script

RE: An Invitation to an Honors Thesis Research: The Power of Positive Conversations

Dear Potential Survey Participants,

You are being contacted today in hopes that you may be interested in participating in my study! My name is Alexandra Spadafino and I am a junior here at Middle Tennessee State University majoring in Organizational Communications. As a student within the Honors College, I am responsible for completing a thesis. After a careful consideration, my thesis is looking at how Instagram usage affects our romantic relationships, specifically, conflict within our relationship. This survey will go towards finalizing and hopefully publishing my thesis.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether positive or negative conversations directly affect Instagram-related conflict resolution in a romantic relationship. I plan to collect data from a pool of 100-150 Middle Tennessee State University students, each of whom will have two options. Option one indicates that participants must be in a romantic relationship for at least half a year and both partners must have had an Instagram account for at least a year. Option two expresses that participants may use a past relationship under the condition that the relationship was within the past two years. Once this has been decided, participants will answer a series of multiple-choice questions that will allow for the researcher to obtain information about what may cause conflict, how conflict is managed, and lastly, how that management affects the relationship.

IRB details:
Primary Investigator: Alexandra Spadafino
PI Department & College: Communication, College of Liberal Arts
Faculty Advisor (if PI is a student): Xiaowei Shi, Ph.D.
Protocol Title: Power of Positive Talk: A study on College Students' Reactions to Romantic Partners' Instagram Dependence
Protocol ID: 22-1138 2q   Approval Date: 04/22/2022   Expiration Date: 04/30/2023

Target Participant Pool
In order to participate, you must be 18 years or older, and an enrolled student at MTSU. Both partners must have an Instagram and have been in either a current relationship for half of a year or a past relationship within the past two years.

Risks and Discomforts
We do not anticipate that you will experience any discomforts from participating in this study beyond those ordinarily encountered in daily life or when performing routine physical or psychological tasks.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to you. However, we hope that, by participating in this project, you will gain some insight and understanding about our research topic on positive conversation over social-media induced conflicts. The participants will not be compensated except for extra credit for research participation upon your course instructor's approval.

Additional Information
- The entire study should not take more than 15-20 minutes.
- This is an anonymous online study. Your name will not be collected.
- Your participation in this online survey is voluntary.

Compensation

The participants will not be compensated except for extra credit for research participation upon your course instructor's approval.

Contact Information

If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact Dr. Xiaowei Shi, at Xiaowei.Shi@mtsu.edu or by telephone at (765)-409-5788. You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615)-494-8918 or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu).

Please enter the survey by clicking the link in the bottom of the email. You will be given a chance to read the entire informed consent to assist you to make a final determination.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this study!

Yours Sincerely,

Alexandra Spadafino

https://mtsu.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9RYWSFnF0NJnePs

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Instagram Addictive Behavior, Relational Conflict and Relational Satisfaction

	Relation-Satisfaction
Predictor	β
Step 1	
Participant Age	.003
Participant Gender	.010
Relationship Length	.255**
Partner's Daily Instagram Use	-.18 *
R^2	.09
F	2.908*
Step 2	
Instagram Addictive Behavior	-.25**
ΔR^2	.06
F	8.498**
Step 3	
Relational Conflict	-.18+
ΔR^2	.03
R^2	.18
F	3.74+
Step 4	
Positive Talk	.314***
ΔR^2.	10
R^2	.27
F	15.48***

*** $p< .001$; ** $p< .01$; * $p< .05$; $+ p<.06$.