

Should You Post That? A Social Mindfulness Approach to Sharing Information About Others Online

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ABSTRACT People commonly post content that is about others, for example, when they upload photographs of friends or tag family members in written posts. This article reviews the antecedents and outcomes of posting about others and proposes social mindfulness as a means of decision making that might enable people to avoid negative outcomes from online sharing (e.g., friends feeling betrayed). Social mindfulness entails being thoughtful of others and is enabled by attention and perspective taking. In the context of online postings, social mindfulness involves directing attention to content, taking the perspectives of the others involved, and making decisions that are thought to align with others' preferences. Two preregistered studies supplemented this conceptual work. One established the prevalence of the phenomenon, showing that nearly half of people's posts contain information about others. The second demonstrated that being socially mindful predicted being less likely to post content that others might object to sharing.

In recent decades, consumers have flocked to social networking sites to consume content others have shared and contribute postings of their own. For example, consumers upload more than one billion photographs on Instagram daily (Broz 2024). Yet some platforms have begun to experience a decline in consumer postings, with 61% of adults indicating that they have become more selective about what they post (Tran 2023). In turn, fewer user-generated posts have hurt the quality of site experience. As feeds have become dominated by ads or community group postings, users have tempered their social media use or quit altogether (Liscomb 2024). Given that user-generated content is the lifeblood of these sites, and those who contribute it are of financial value to firms (Zhang et al. 2012), it is imperative for firm managers to understand what drives people to contribute content and what outcomes they experience when they do.

For consumers, making decisions about whether to post can be difficult, not least because posts often contain infor-

mation about others (i.e., stakeholders).¹ For example, posts might include photos or videos that reveal stakeholders' activities and whereabouts. We conducted a preregistered pilot study (<https://aspredicted.org/9m45-8d28.pdf>) to investigate how often consumers' posts contain information about others. A total of 267 consumers looked at their most recent Facebook post and indicated if any other person was pictured, named, or tagged. Nearly half (46.1%) responded affirmatively. These results suggest that posting frequently implicates others, an aspect that could complicate the sharing decision process. For example, sharers might feel uncertain about whether stakeholders would want the content to be posted.

In the present article, we focused on the phenomenon of sharing information about others within the context of social networking sites. Our first aim was to review and synthesize the literature on why people post about others, and what happens when they do. Past research shows that there are several potential benefits to posting about others, such as a sense of connection with them (Lobinger et al.

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1. Following recent research (e.g., Kamleitner and Mitchell 2019), we use the term "sharer" in reference to consumers who make disclosure decisions, in this case by posting content. We use the term "stakeholders" in reference to the people whose self-relevant details are included within posts.

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2021). At the same time, posting about others is not without risk. It has the potential to generate an array of negative outcomes, such as stakeholders feeling betrayed (Litt and Hargittai 2014), developing feelings of distrust toward sharers (Petronio 2002), or even becoming the victims of crime (Whitehead 2019).

In light of that, our second aim was to develop an approach to posting about others that might help consumers avoid such negative outcomes. To that end, we drew on the construct of social mindfulness. Social mindfulness is defined as being thoughtful of others and making decisions that attend to their needs and wishes (Van Doesum, Van Lange, and Van Lange 2013; Van Lange and Van Doesum 2015). Being thoughtful of others is supported by situational attention and perspective taking. In the context of posting, this involves directing attention to content, which enables people to notice all of the details within it and understand what those details communicate. It also involves considering stakeholders' perspectives regarding whether the content should be posted. Making decisions that attend to others' preferences is carried out through behavior and could entail sharing the content in some capacity or not.

We employed the antecedents, processes, and outcomes framework (fig. 1) to advance theoretical understanding of sharing information about others within the marketing literature. Much scholarship on this topic has developed within the communications and information systems literatures

(e.g., Petronio 2002; Büttner and Rudert 2022). Yet posting about others is highly relevant to consumer behavior given its relation to interdependent privacy (Kamleitner and Mitchell 2019; Demmers, Weihrauch, and Thompson 2022), disclosure (e.g., Kim, Barasz, and John 2021), and choices for others (e.g., Liu, Dallas, and Fitzsimons 2019). Thus, the present work responds to calls for marketing scholars to develop conceptual articles, which are crucial to the discipline's knowledge development and advancement (Yadav 2010; MacInnis 2011).

This conceptual article is supplemented by two preregistered studies. The first was a pilot study (located in app. A; apps. A and B are available online) that demonstrated the prevalence of the phenomenon. Results showed that nearly half of consumers' posts contain information about others. The second study tested whether those higher in trait social mindfulness would be less likely to post photographs that stakeholders might object to sharing. Results confirmed that proposition.

POSTING ABOUT OTHERS: AN INTERDEPENDENT PRIVACY DECISION

Privacy sometimes involves interdependence, insofar as one person can influence what is known about others (Biczók and Chia 2013). Posting can be considered an interdependent privacy decision anytime the content to be posted contains information about other people. For example, a college

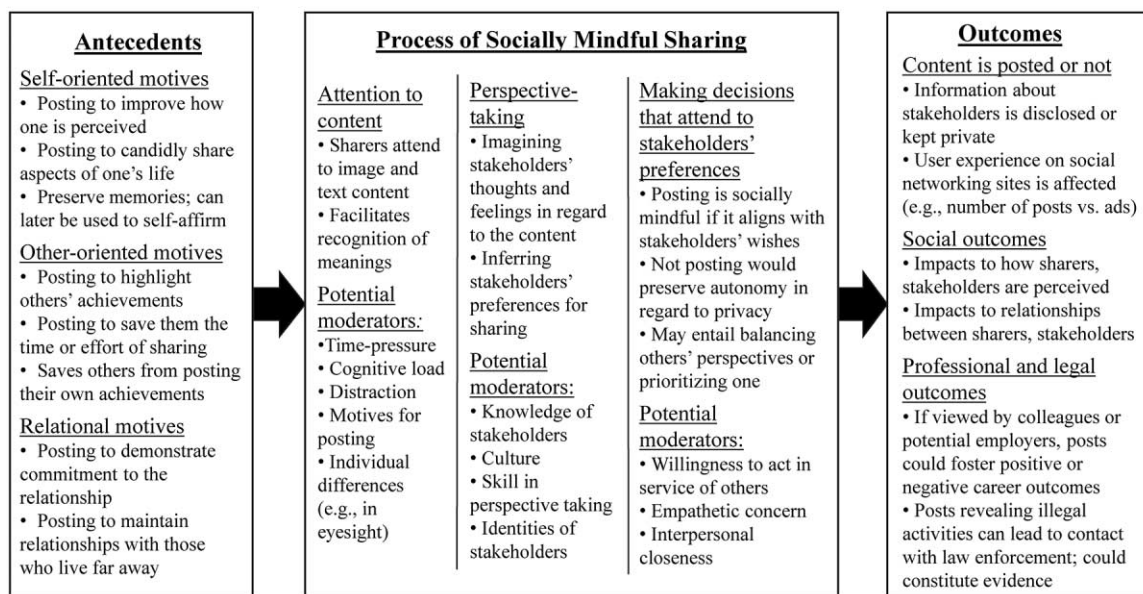


Figure 1. Visual representation of the conceptual framework, which includes antecedents of sharing content about others, the process of socially mindful sharing, and outcomes.

student might have a video of a friend telling a joke, and debate whether to post it on TikTok. As another example, a person might have detailed knowledge of a colleague's strengths, and consider writing a "Recommendation" post for them on LinkedIn. In both cases, sharers could reveal information about stakeholders by posting.

ANTECEDENTS: WHY DO PEOPLE SHARE CONTENT ABOUT OTHERS?

Sharing content online may be considered a form of intentional disclosure (Kim et al. 2021) and an act of online self-presentation (Boyd and Ellison 2007). It therefore could be expected that some of the motives for posting content about others are self-oriented. For example, some may post to preserve memories, thereby creating a repository that they can visit later to self-affirm (Toma and Hancock 2013).

Generally, it is thought that consumers use online platforms to present idealized versions of the self (Manago et al. 2008). This viewpoint has intuitive appeal, as social networking sites are excellent vehicles for impression construction (Krämer and Haferkamp 2011), and one of the main reasons people post content is to influence what others think about them (Toubia and Stephen 2013). From this perspective, people may share content about others in an effort to shape (for the better) how they are viewed. Indeed, research has established that perceptions of people are sometimes influenced by those with whom they are connected (Walther et al. 2008). Intuiting this, people might try to improve how they are perceived by posting content associating them with desirable individuals or in-groups. For example, professional athletes often post about their participation in high-profile parties and galas (Smith and Sander-son 2015).

A different perspective, however, argues that people's digital disclosures are reflections of their actual personalities (Back et al. 2010). Supporting this view is research showing that personality traits can be predicted with some degree of accuracy from people's favorited photographs (Segalin et al. 2016) and profiles on X (formerly Twitter; Golbeck et al. 2011). Thus, sharing content about others might rather candidly reflect aspects of the self. Indeed, people share content that is relevant to their self-concept (Chung and Darke 2006)—and the self, being social in nature, relates to other people (Baumeister 1998).

At the same time, motives for sharing content about others may be other-oriented. Just as people use social networking sites to present themselves in a positive light, they may also use it to present their social connections favorably. For

example, people sometimes use social networking sites to highlight others' achievements (VanEpps, Hart, and Schweitzer 2023). This saves people from having to post about their own successes, which others may judge as bragging (Scopel-liti, Loewenstein, and Vosgerau 2015).

Still another motive involves the desire to forge connections with others.² Posting photographs taken with others can demonstrate commitment and the importance of the relationship to the individuals' identities (Robards and Lincoln 2016). Furthermore, sharing about social activities can help maintain relationships with audience members (Kras-nova et al. 2010), who might not have been able to partici-pate, for example, due to living far away. These findings sug-gest that sharing content about others could be an effective way of forging and maintaining relationships, which sharers may be trying to achieve.

PROCESS: SOCIALLY MINDFUL DECISION MAKING

Social mindfulness is about being thoughtful of others and taking actions that attend to their needs and wishes (Van Lange and Van Doesum 2015). It is similar to the general concept of mindfulness insofar as both involve attending to the present moment, which facilitates awareness of de-tails relevant to the decision-making context (Van Doesum et al. 2013). However, social mindfulness takes a stronger focus on others. While being other-oriented is part of the Buddhist traditions from which mindfulness originates (Black 2011), the contemporary practice of mindfulness tends to focus more strongly on the self or aspects of self-experience such as the breath (Gebauer et al. 2018).

Social mindfulness is associated with a prosocial social value orientation, along with the personality traits of agree-ableness, honesty-humility, and empathy (Van Doesum et al. 2013, 2020). Being high in trait social mindfulness is posi-tively associated with concern for societal issues (Kirkland et al. 2022) and negatively associated with moral disengage-ment and narcissism (Van Doesum et al. 2020). It is often measured as a trait, but also can be induced through inter-ventions (Van Doesum et al. 2013).

Social mindfulness is studied within interdependent con-texts—that is, situations in which one person's actions have the ability to impact outcomes for others (Van Doesum et al.

2. In reviewing the motives one by one, we do not mean to imply that they are mutually exclusive. Like any behavior, sharing could be deter-mined by a mixture of motives.

2013). It is therefore well suited to decisions about sharing content about others. Making decisions that are socially mindful would entail choosing behaviors that align with stakeholders' preferences. Foundational to that decision is understanding what the content communicates, which attention facilitates, and understanding stakeholders' wishes, which perspective taking enables.

Directing Attention to Content

The content of an online post can include images (e.g., photographs), text (e.g., captions) or combinations thereof (Li and Xie 2020). Socially mindful sharing would entail paying attention to these aspects of content. Attention allows for the recognition of meanings, and is necessary to make sense of scenes, which image content can portray (Intraub 1984; Cohen, Alvarez, and Nakayama 2011). Once attention is directed to the content, meanings can be ascertained quickly, sometimes in fractions of a second (Potter 1975).

Meanings fall into two general categories: denotative and connotative. Denotative meanings are elements of an entity expressed in literal or descriptive terms (Barthes 1999). Connotative meanings are subjective (Barthes 1999; Sturken and Cartwright 2009).

Sharers themselves often write the text content of posts, and would presumably understand the denotative and connotative aspects of what they are writing. The connotative aspects of image content, in contrast, might need to be detected through attention. Examples of connotative meanings that image content could convey include social status, which may be expressed through clothing (Argyle 1972), emotions, which can be revealed through facial expressions (Ekman 1993), and behaviors, which may be suggested by objects (e.g., drinking implied by wine glasses; Morgan, Snelson, and Elison-Bowers 2010).

Time pressures, cognitive load, and distraction could potentially impair the attention that social mindfulness requires (Van Lange and Van Doesum 2015). It is possible that the presence of self-relevant stimuli, which are particularly apt in capturing attention (Bargh 1982), could serve as a source of distraction. For instance, in selfies taken with friends, sharers might concentrate on their own appearance and fail to notice specific details about their friends (e.g., objects they are holding). In a similar vein, if people have self-oriented (vs. other-oriented) motives for posting, they might be less likely to pay attention to how others are portrayed by posts.

People also vary in their ability to observe details, even when they are attending to content deliberately. For example, those with poor eyesight might not notice relevant de-

tails that inform the content's meaning. This could prevent successful perspective taking, discussed next.

Taking Stakeholders' Perspectives

Considering the viewpoints of others is a cognitive process known as perspective taking (Batson, Early, and Salvarani 1997). Perspective taking relates to theory of mind, which involves the attribution of mental states to others—and the recognition that those mental states may differ from one's own (Premack and Woodruff 1978). There are two general forms of perspective taking. One relates to taking others' perspectives regarding the self (Mead 1934). The other relates to imagining how others would think and feel (Stotland 1969). The latter, which requires empathy, is the form relevant to socially mindful decision making. Indeed, empathetic concern (one dimension of empathy) is integral to social mindfulness (Van Doesum et al. 2013).

In the context of posting, perspective taking enables sharers to infer whether stakeholders would want the content to be made visible to others. Inferences could be made on the basis of how stakeholders are likely to regard the content. They also could be influenced by how audience members may react, and whether stakeholders would want to induce or avoid such reactions.

To understand how stakeholders would regard the content, sharers could assess whether it fits with stakeholders' online self-presentation. People tend to dislike posts that contradict their own self-presentation, for example by revealing parts of their life that they would prefer to keep private (Robards and Lincoln 2016) or showing them with people that they'd rather not be associated with (Litt et al. 2014; Yang 2018). When it comes to photographs, people tend to favor sharing those that show them in a flattering light, and oppose sharing those that don't (McLaughlin and Vitak 2012; Bell 2019). Evaluating content from stakeholders' perspectives might allow sharers to detect any such undesirable aspects.

Stakeholders' views of content are likely to be influenced by whether others would approve or disapprove of the meanings conveyed. Social approval is a general goal of self-presentation (Baumeister 1982), which social networking sites enable (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Therefore, stakeholders might favor sharing content to the extent that it is likely to generate social approval. For example, stakeholders might want sharers to post video of a road race, because it shows they were exercising, a virtuous behavior (Conrad 1994). In contrast, stakeholders would likely oppose sharing content that reveals social norm violations, meaning attitudes or

behaviors that would be seen as unacceptable (Chekroun and Brauer 2002). For example, stakeholders may be against sharing photographs that imply smoking or illegal activity, as those behaviors elicit widespread social disapproval (Grasmick and Green 1980; Hoek, Edwards, and Waa 2022).

Taking others' perspectives depends on having knowledge of those people (Nickerson 1999). If people lack knowledge of stakeholders' online self-presentation and privacy preferences, they may be unable to surmise whether those stakeholders would want the content to be posted.

Individual differences also could influence perspective taking. Members of independent (vs. interdependent) cultures are more prone to forgetting to take others' perspectives (Wu and Keysar 2007). Even within a given culture, people's skills in perspective taking may vary. Greater skill is thought to facilitate smoother social functioning (Davis 1983), in the present context by understanding and acting in line with stakeholders' preferences. If sharers lack the skills to assess stakeholders' views regarding a piece of content, they might not be able to accurately determine stakeholders' preferences for sharing.

The nature of the relationship between sharers and stakeholders also could play a role in perspective taking, as well as sharers' responses to stakeholders' views. For example, taking the perspective of competitors can promote egocentrism and unethical behavior (Epley, Caruso, and Bazerman 2006). This finding perhaps suggests that smoother social functioning associated with perspective taking may be limited to cooperative relationships. Power differences also could influence perspective taking. Those who are lower in power are often vulnerable to the views and actions of higher-power others. Knowing this, people are likely to consider how their actions may alter what higher-power others would think or do in response (Fiske 1993). In contrast, those who are higher in power are less likely to take lower-power others' perspectives (Galinsky et al. 2006). Therefore, sharers' propensities to engage in perspective taking may depend on their position of power relative to stakeholders.

Making Decisions That Attend to Others' Needs and Wishes

A key aspect of social mindfulness, taking actions that attend to others' preferences, depends on the willingness to choose behaviors that benefit others (Van Doesum et al. 2013). This is supported by the affective dimension of empathy, termed empathetic concern. Possessing empathetic concern enables decision making that serves others' needs and wishes, potentially at the expense of one's own.

One basic way of attending to others' needs is by preserving their autonomy. Indeed, autonomy is considered a human need (Ryan and Deci 2000). It is defined as the ability to make choices on one's own (Deci and Ryan 1987), without external influences or constraints (Wertenbroch et al. 2020).

Past research has evaluated people's trait social mindfulness on the basis of how often they act to preserve others' autonomy (Van Doesum et al. 2013, 2020). Making choices that preserve others' autonomy is considered to be socially mindful. Maintaining others' autonomy in terms of privacy relates to giving them the ability to choose whether their self-relevant details are made known to others. Privacy is defined as control of others' access to the self (Altman 1975). Through posting, certain details about stakeholders are de facto revealed, leaving stakeholders with little control. Even if posts are deleted, others' knowledge of them would not be reversed (Sharot and Sunstein 2020).

Thus, not sharing content about others in any capacity would be the most effective means of preserving stakeholders' autonomy in terms of privacy. We expect that not sharing might align with some stakeholders' wishes. Yet we do not presume that every stakeholder prefers complete privacy all of the time. In some cases, stakeholders might prefer some form of sharing, thus rendering the act of posting the socially mindful behavior.

We expect that in some cases, sharers might involve stakeholders in the decision process (e.g., by asking which photographs they should post). This is similar to the way people solicit others' opinions on which products to purchase for them (Davis 1976). Because privacy is defined as controlling access to the self (Altman 1975), giving stakeholders some control over whether and which photographs are posted represents one way of respecting their privacy.

Yet involving stakeholders in sharing decisions is often not practical. Collectively, consumers post more than 1 billion photographs daily (Broz 2024). Asking every person's opinion before posting would be time consuming and laborious. Furthermore, stakeholders may be reluctant to express their true opinions, as people generally want to seem easygoing (Liu and Min 2020). Even so, involving stakeholders might make sense in some cases, such as when photographs have the potential to reveal particularly private information. Asking their perspectives is likely to enable a more accurate understanding of their preferences compared to perspective taking alone (Eyal, Steffel, and Epley 2018).

One challenge in decision contexts involving others is that different stakeholders could have different preferences. For example, some stakeholders might be in favor of posting

photographs, while others might be opposed. The perspective taking involved in social mindfulness would allow sharers to anticipate these various reactions. A decision could be made by prioritizing one stakeholder's preferences or by balancing the preferences of various stakeholders, as these are common ways people make decisions for others (Liu et al. 2019).

Another way of attending to stakeholders' preferences could be to limit the details revealed, for example, by cropping the photographs or posting only the best photographs out of the set. This is similar to exercising reserve and discretion in communications (Simmel 1906; Murphy 1964) or restricting the breadth of information disclosed (Omarzu 2000). People use such strategies to limit the risks associated with disclosure.

Sharers also could respond to stakeholders' preferences regarding with whom content should be shared. On many platforms, audiences can be restricted through privacy settings (Vitak et al. 2015). Research suggests that when people are able to define their audiences, they become more likely to post (Sleeper et al. 2013). Another option could be to use relatively private modes of sharing (e.g., direct messages). Sharing with select audience members could be considered a form of limited communication, which is a means of protecting privacy by restricting to whom information is disclosed (Westin 1968).

Social mindfulness requires the willingness to act in service of others' interests (Van Doesum et al. 2013). This willingness is supported by empathetic concern, which may be affected by people's environments and temperaments (Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow 1990). It also could be influenced by relationships with stakeholders. People are more likely to demonstrate social mindfulness toward friends than strangers (Van Doesum 2011), which suggests that interpersonal closeness with stakeholders could predict taking actions aligned with their preferences.

OUTCOMES OF SHARING CONTENT ABOUT OTHERS

Positive Outcomes

Sharing favorable content about others can improve how sharers are perceived. When people share positive information about the self and others, they are seen as both warm and competent (VanEpps et al. 2023). Those who share photographs with close others are seen as more authentic, and their posts receive more likes (vs. photographs depicting one or no people; Chung, Ding, and Kalra 2023).

Sharing information about stakeholders also can benefit how stakeholders are perceived. When information is shared by someone else, it seems less likely to have been manipu-

lated for one's own self-benefit (Walther and Parks 2002). Thus, audience members tend to assume that it provides a truer picture of the person's offline self (Walther et al. 2008).

The comments and messages left by others can contribute to stakeholders' development of a positive online identity (Larsen 2008). It can improve stakeholders' self-views by affirming their sense of self (Belk 2013). It also saves them the time and effort associated with posting, which sometimes feels like work (Anderson, Hamilton, and Toner 2016).

Posting about others also may benefit sharers' relationships with them. Online interactions (e.g., posting to others' timelines) are associated with increases in tie strength among those involved (Burke and Kraut 2014), and posting pictures taken together can enhance the connectedness felt among those depicted (Lobinger et al. 2021).

Negative Outcomes

Being known to others can come with risks, many of which have been documented in the literature on self-disclosure. For example, disclosure can result in social rejection (Omarzu 2000) or becoming vulnerable to crime (John, Acquisti, and Loewenstein 2011). These same risks can result from others' posts. For example, posting vacation photographs can reveal that people are far from home, leaving them susceptible to burglary (Whitehead 2019).

Disclosing information that stakeholders would have preferred to keep private can hurt sharers' relationships with them. Stakeholders may feel betrayed (Litt and Hargittai 2014) or become distrustful, attributing the error to an inability to understand their expectations for privacy (Petronio 2002). Audience members also may develop negative views of sharers, for example if they engage in name-calling on social networking sites (McLaughlin and Vitak 2012) or share information that was a secret (Hart et al. 2024). When sharers themselves detect that they have posted something inappropriate, they experience feelings of regret (Moore and McElroy 2012).

Sharers sometimes post content that stakeholders would have preferred to keep private from a given audience. For example, some college students post photographs that insinuate smoking or drinking alcohol. This can cause negative outcomes for the students in the photos (e.g., conflict with their parents; parents threatening to stop paying tuition [Litt and Hargittai 2014; Robards and Lincoln 2016]).

Occasionally posts about others can cause them to experience negative professional or legal consequences. For instance, Finland's 46th prime minister, Sanna Marin, came

under public scrutiny when a friend posted a risqué photograph taken in her official residence. Although Marin did not appear in the photograph, it provided a window into her private life that sparked criticism (BBC News 2022). In extreme cases, posts can incriminate, leading to arrests and indictments. For example, police arrested a couple who had posted photographs of themselves holding cash after robbing a bank (Ferringo 2015) and alleged gang members after some boasted on Twitter about shootings and robberies (Prokucecz, Dienst, and Valiquette 2012). In those cases, one person's post implicated other individuals in the alleged crime.

EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW

To supplant the conceptual work that outlines the link between social mindfulness and posting decisions, we conducted a preliminary study. This study tested the general proposition that social mindfulness would predict being more responsive to others' wishes in the context of photo sharing.

People have differing capacities for social mindfulness and exhibit socially mindful behavior to varying degrees (Van Doesum et al. 2013). Thus, we aimed to test how trait social mindfulness predicts photo sharing decisions. We expected that when it comes to photographs that stakeholders might object to sharing, those higher in trait social mindfulness would be less likely to share.

Method

This preregistered study (<https://aspredicted.org/g2mz-qjh8.pdf>) collected responses from 195 participants on the Prolific platform ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.67$, $SD = 12.11$; 55.4% female). Participants read that they would complete a study with two unrelated parts. The order of the two parts was counterbalanced.

One part of the study measured trait social mindfulness. It did so through the choice task that has been used in past social mindfulness research (e.g., Van Doesum et al. 2013, 2020). Details regarding this task are located in appendix B.

The other part of the study measured likelihood of sharing photographs of others. Participants read 10 scenarios (table 1) and indicated how likely they would be to post them on social media (1 = *extremely unlikely*, 7 = *extremely likely*). The scenarios described photographs with aspects that stakeholders might object to sharing.

Results

Following the preregistration, we formed a social mindfulness score. We also formed a composite measure of sharing likelihood by averaging responses to all photo-sharing scenarios ($\alpha = .85$).

We conducted a linear regression in which the social mindfulness score was entered as the independent variable, and the composite measure of sharing likelihood was entered as the dependent variable. Results showed that greater social mindfulness predicted a lower likelihood of sharing photographs of others ($b = -1.203$, $p = .006$).

Following the preregistration, we conducted additional linear regressions to test the relationships between social mindfulness and the individual scenarios. Results of those analyses are located in table 2.

Discussion

This preregistered study demonstrated that greater social mindfulness predicts being less likely to share photographs of others. In this study, we used scenarios in which the photographs conveyed certain details that stakeholders might object to sharing. This suggests that people who are high in trait social mindfulness are attuned to these details and are likely to attend to stakeholders' wishes by not posting such photographs.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Many platforms rely on consumers to contribute user-generated content, a source of considerable financial value to firms (Zhang et al. 2012). The present work focused on consumer posts that contain information about others. A pilot study suggested that sharing content about others is common, as nearly half of consumers' recent Facebook posts contained other-references (e.g., photos of others; tags). To enhance theoretical understanding of sharing information about others, we reviewed and synthesized the literature on this topic, organizing it through the antecedents, processes, and outcomes framework (Cerasoli et al. 2018).

Extant theoretical perspectives suggest that consumers' motives for posting about others could be self-oriented, other-oriented, or relational. While sharing information about others can result in positive outcomes, such as sharers being perceived as warm and competent (VanEpps et al. 2023), there are also potential negative outcomes. People's posts may invade others' privacy, hurt relationships with them, or in extreme cases cause legal or professional trouble.

We proposed social mindfulness as a process that could help guide consumers' decisions about posting. Social mindfulness is about being thoughtful of others and making decisions that attend to their wishes. Being thoughtful of others involves attention, in this case to the content that might be shared. Attention enables the perception of relevant details and the recognition of what they mean. Grasping the potential

Table 1. Dependent Variable (Photo-Sharing) Scenarios, Descriptions, and Aspects of the Scenarios That Others May Object to Sharing Online

| Scenario | Description | Aspect that others may object to sharing |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Birthday party | Imagine that you attend a surprise party for a friend who is having a milestone birthday. There is a huge turnout, and your friend is both shocked and delighted. Before leaving, you snap a couple of photographs with your friend. Overall, you look pretty good in them. However, they are not the most flattering photographs of your friend. | The friend is portrayed in an unflattering way. |
| Wedding photos | Imagine that you attend a friend's wedding, which is an intimate affair at a small venue. The guest list is limited to the couple's closest friends and family. You know that some of your other friends are quite disappointed not to have been invited. During the reception, you take some pictures with the newlyweds using the venue's photobooth. | The friends who were not invited may feel hurt. |
| Toddler in pajamas | Imagine that you have a 2-year-old who is just transitioning from a crib to a bed. To celebrate this turning point, you take some photos of your toddler wearing pajamas and sitting on the bed. | The toddler's privacy preferences are unknown; the photo was taken in a private context. |
| Holiday party | Imagine that you host a holiday party and invite many of your friends and colleagues. It's a great success, and many guests stay late into the night. Some of your colleagues seem to let their guard down, and enjoy the opportunity for dancing, drinks, and revelry. You take a number of photographs, which show how much fun everyone was having. | Drinking and revelry could be judged negatively. |
| European trip | You take a European vacation with your family and document your experiences by taking many photographs. It is clear from the landmarks that everyone is enjoying their time in Europe, which is far from home in the United States. While you are still on vacation, how likely are you to post these photographs on social media? | Stakeholders' locations could be revealed. |
| Emotional story | At a family reunion, relatives gather to reconnect after years apart. Amidst the festivities, one family member shares a heartfelt story about overcoming a personal struggle, becoming emotional as they speak. You are moved by this, and take some photos to capture the sentimentality of the occasion. | The photographs show an emotional state. |
| Pool photos | You have a pool in your backyard. One hot summer day, you invite your friends to come over for an afternoon of swimming and poolside lounging. Even your friends who are self-conscious get into their swimsuits and enjoy their time by the pool. You take some candid photographs throughout the day. | The friends are self-conscious about wearing swimsuits. |
| Vaping device | You meet up with friends for dinner at an outdoor restaurant. Throughout the evening, you take a few photographs. For the most part, everyone looks good and seems to be having a nice time. On the table, there are some food and drink items, along with your friend's vaping device. | The friend's vaping device is visible. |
| Private friend | You go hiking with a few friends, one of whom is very private and dislikes posting on social media. Throughout the afternoon, you capture shots of the group enjoying the nice weather and scenic landscape. | One friend has strong privacy preferences. |
| Cat in bedroom | You look out your apartment window and notice that there is a fluffy, white cat sitting in the window of the next building. Behind the cat, you can see that there is a bed and a nightstand. You don't know who lives in the apartment but decide to take some photographs of their adorable cat. | The photographs show a private context. |

Table 2. Results of Linear Regression Analyses with Social Mindfulness Score as the Independent Variable and Individual Scenarios as the Dependent Variables

| Scenario name | Unstandardized coefficient (<i>b</i>) | <i>p</i> -value |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|
| Birthday party | −1.309 | .017 |
| Wedding photos | −1.320 | .056 |
| Toddler in pajamas | −1.120 | .128 |
| Holiday party | −1.184 | .082 |
| European trip | −1.509 | .049 |
| Emotional story | −1.794 | .004 |
| Pool photos | −.361 | .560 |
| Vaping device | −1.441 | .047 |
| Private friend | −.870 | .158 |
| Cat in bedroom | −1.123 | .099 |

implications of the content allows sharers to understand stakeholders' perspectives, specifically regarding whether they would like the content to be shared. Sharers can then attend to these preferences, either by not sharing (which would best preserve stakeholders' autonomy in terms of privacy) or by sharing in some capacity.

Results of one preregistered study supported the proposition that social mindfulness might help consumers make better posting-related decisions. Results showed that those who were higher in social mindfulness were less likely to post content that others might object to sharing.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

We limited the present investigation to online sharing decisions. These decisions are similar to those made in offline contexts insofar as both involve potentially communicating information about others. However, there are important distinctions between online and offline contexts. First, online posts are often persistent (e.g., they may remain on sharers' profiles indefinitely; Boyd 2010), whereas offline sharing (e.g., showing someone a photograph) tends to be ephemeral. Second, online audiences may be larger and more heterogeneous than offline audiences (Gil-Lopez et al. 2018). Both the persistence of posts and the presence of large, heterogeneous audiences can raise the stakes of online sharing decisions and render social mindfulness a particularly helpful approach to employ.

When it comes to verbal communication, it may be relatively more difficult to apply social mindfulness to offline (vs. online) disclosure decisions. When people prepare to

post text online, they have the opportunity to review before sharing. In contrast, people plan what they are going to say out loud internally (Cohen and Perrault 1979). Attending to as-yet unspoken utterances and considering others' likely perspectives regarding them could be challenging, especially during fast-paced, synchronous conversations. We therefore expect that—while social mindfulness would be useful in guiding offline, verbal disclosure decisions—there could be obstacles to its application.

Like any empirical investigation, the study we conducted has several limitations. One is that it only considered photographs with aspects that others may object to sharing. Because it did not consider nonobjectionable photographs as a control, we cannot draw conclusions regarding how social mindfulness may influence decisions about sharing nonobjectionable content. The correlational nature of the data, due to measuring rather than manipulating social mindfulness, prevents us from concluding that social mindfulness causes reduced likelihood of sharing objectionable content. However, we expect that it would do so and encourage scholars to investigate this possibility. Finally, while results showed a significant difference for the overall linear regression, we acknowledge that there were not significant differences for some of the individual photo-sharing scenarios. Reporting results for those individual scenarios provides transparency regarding how they contributed to the overall significant difference observed.

More broadly, the present work showcases the need for marketing scholars to develop theories of consumer decisions regarding sharing information about others. Table 3 provides examples of specific questions for future research to address.

CONCLUSION

Posting about other people online is common among consumers. Doing so is interdependent insofar as one person's actions have the ability to impact what is revealed about others. The present work organized existing research on sharing information about others, drawing on the construct of social mindfulness to explain which, when, and how consumers can make decisions that account for others' preferences. By attending to the content at hand, taking the perspectives of stakeholders, and making sharing decisions that reflect stakeholders' presumed preferences, consumers may avoid negative outcomes associated with posting content about others online. The results of a study revealed that trait social mindfulness predicted not sharing photographs that could result in negative outcomes,

Table 3. Questions for Future Research to Address

| Category | Subcategory | Research question |
|-------------|---|--|
| Antecedents | Self-oriented motives | Are self-oriented (vs. other-oriented or relational) motives for posting associated with less socially mindful sharing decisions? |
| | Other-oriented motives | Are other-oriented (vs. self-oriented or relational) motives for posting associated with better outcomes for stakeholders? Are there contexts in which sharing decisions guided by other-oriented motives backfire and harm stakeholders? |
| | Relational motives | Are relational (vs. self- or other-oriented) motives for sharing associated with better relational outcomes? In what contexts might sharing decisions driven by relational motives backfire and cause relational harm? |
| Processes | Attention to content | Does the type of content influence sharers' attention to it? For example, are sharers more likely to attend to the details of written text versus the details conveyed by videos? Does post ephemerality influence attention to content? For example, are sharers less likely to attend to the details of photos when creating a temporary Instagram story versus a persistent post? |
| | Perspective-taking | Would sharers be more likely to consider the perspectives of those who are featured prominently (vs. in the background) of photos or videos? Are there contexts in which the perspectives of those in the background would guide sharing decisions? Does the number of stakeholders influence the likelihood of perspective taking? For example, in photographs of 10 people (vs. two people), would sharers be less likely to take stakeholders' perspectives? |
| | Making decisions that attend to stakeholders' preferences | Does the number of other-references influence sharers' decisions? For example, are sharers more likely to make decisions that attend to others' preferences when others are shown in multiple photographs (vs. one)? Are sharers more likely to make decisions that attend to stakeholders' preferences when the content does not make reference to sharers themselves (e.g., the sharer is not visible in the photograph)? |
| Outcomes | Content is posted or not | Does socially mindful sharing enhance stakeholders' privacy (e.g., due to sharers not posting objectionable content)? Does socially mindful decision making increase how much or how often people share (e.g., due to greater confidence that their actions align with stakeholders' wishes)? |
| | Social | Do socially mindful sharing decisions reflect what or how often stakeholders would like them to share? Does socially mindful sharing improve social outcomes (e.g., by reducing the likelihood of conflict between sharers and stakeholders)? |
| | Legal and professional | Is socially mindful sharing less likely to cause negative legal and professional outcomes for stakeholders? |

such as someone else being negatively judged. These findings, along with the conceptual framework we developed, lay the groundwork for future research on online posting decisions, with implications for consumers and the firms that serve them.

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