



Instagram

# I'm big on *Instagram*: The effect of number of followers on perceived status and physical attractiveness



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## I. Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of social media popularity on status and attractiveness judgments. We focused on Instagram, a platform in which users gain followers and status by sharing photo and video content. For the purpose of this study, we created different versions of female and male mock-up Instagram profiles, each with 28,

155 or 28,000 “followers” while holding all other aspects (number of posts, photos, etc.) constant. A higher number of followers was associated with increased status estimates for male profiles only and did not affect physical attractiveness ratings. By contrast, male assessments of female profiles were entirely unaffected by the number of followers.

## II. Introduction

*“What’s the highest number of followers of someone you had sex with at Coachella?”*  
Spade (2016)

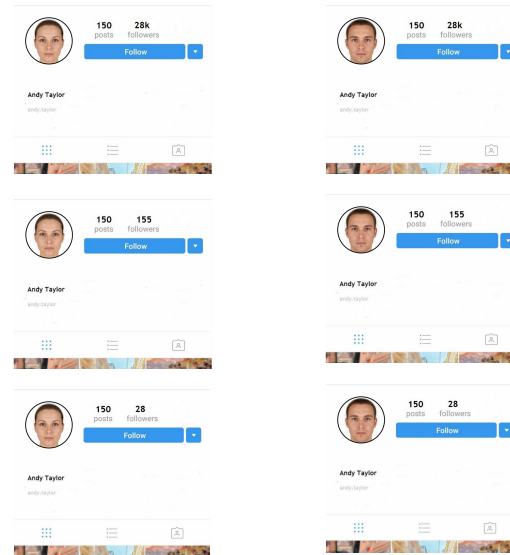
As females tend to place a higher value on status cues when evaluating potential mates (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993), status symbol ownership has been shown to affect female ratings of male attractiveness (e.g. Dunn & Searle, 2010; Dunn & Hill, 2014). Furthermore, some studies suggest that online popularity, assessed through the number of Facebook friends, can also affect perceptions of attractiveness (i.e. Søtt, 2014; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008). However, while

Facebook as a social networking platform has been studied extensively (see Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012), there have been few studies investigating self-presentation on Instagram, despite it being the second most used social networking platform with more than 500 million users (DeMers, 2017). Our hypotheses were that increased number of followers would be tied to higher status estimates for both sexes, and higher physical attractiveness estimates of male profiles by female raters.

## III. Methods

We created six images (three female and three male) depicting mock Instagram profiles with a generic androgynous name. Each had 28, 155 or 28,000 (28k) “followers” while all other aspects (number of posts, photos, etc.) were held constant. We used composite images created by DeBruine & Jones (2015) as profile images.

The number of followers were chosen to reflect few followers, many followers, and an intermediate number of followers. The study was conducted online using Qualtrics. We randomly assigned each participant to view an opposite-sex profile, after which they had to rate the person depicted in the profile using the Mate Value Inventory (Kirsner, Figueredo & Jacobs, 2003).



## IV. Results

310 participants (F=71% M=29%), whose mean age was 24.24 (sd=6.7) completed the study. A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference ( $p>0.05$ ) in ratings of physical attractiveness as a function of number of followers for either sex (Table 1., Graph 1.).

However, females rated males with more followers as having significantly higher ( $p<0.05$ ) status (Table 2, Graph 2.).

Table 1.

	Number of followers	M	SEM	F	p
Attractiveness	28	11.086	.662		
	M 155	11.440	.617	.956	.388
	28 000	10.133	.707		
	28	11.371	.447		
	F 150	11.028	.407	.591	.554
	28 000	10.744	.378		

Graph 1.

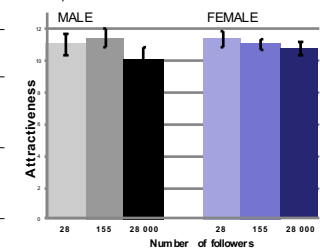
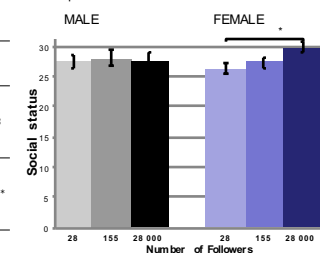


Table 2.

	Number of followers	M	SEM	F	p
High social status	28	27.286	1.342		
	M 155	27.920	1.518	.043	.958
	28 000	27.467	1.727		
	28	26.290	.875		
	F 155	27.375	.936	4.211	.016*
	28 000	29.821	.856		

\*  $p<0.05$

Graph 2.



## V. Conclusion

As predicted, we found that females rated males with a higher number of followers as having higher status. However, number of followers did not affect ratings of male attractiveness. By contrast, males were entirely unaffected by the number of followers on female profiles. The results that the number of followers affected female assessment of male status but not vice versa, fits with the existing literature, however having a large number of Instagram followers does not create the same effect on attractiveness assessment as

having a large number of friends on Facebook or being depicted with real life status symbols does. One possible explanation can be that Instagram popularity does not translate to attractiveness because the profiles lacked contextual cues (personal description, photos, the number of likes and comments on the photographs) as to how or why the number of followers was acquired. Future studies would do well to include contextual information as well as investigate same-sex ratings of attractiveness.

## VI. Literature

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