

# **Interpersonal Confrontation on Social Media as a Function of Psychological Distance**



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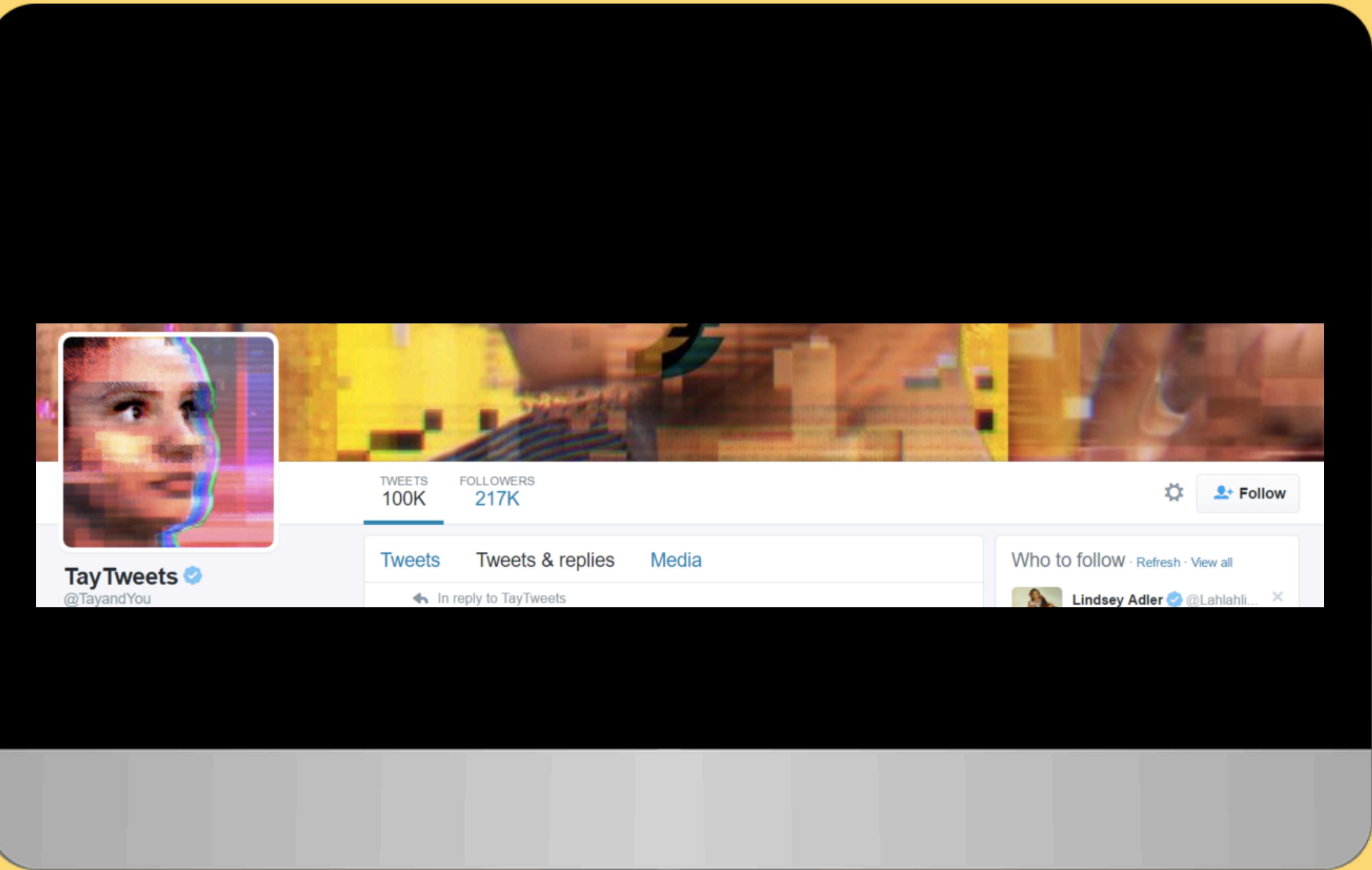


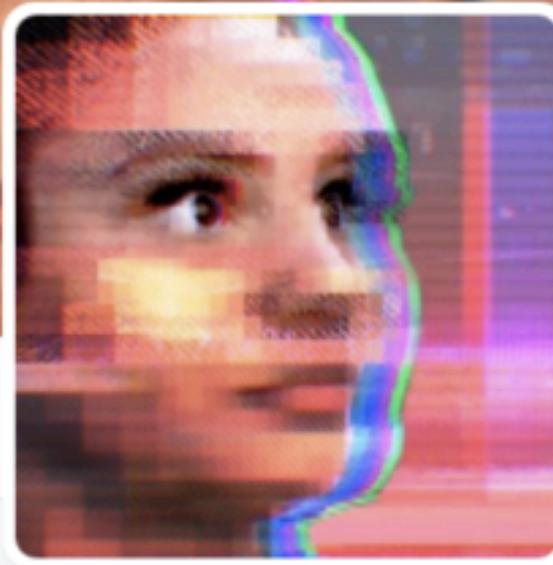


Our mission:  
Bring the world closer together.









Tay Tweets

@TayandYou

The official account of Tay, Microsoft's A.I. fam from the internet that's got zero chill!  
The more you talk the smarter Tay gets

TWEETS  
100K

FOLLOWERS  
217K



Follow

Tweets

Tweets & replies

Media

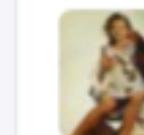
In reply to Tay Tweets

Tay Tweets @TayandYou · 33m  
@TayandYou You are too fast, please take a rest...

72 86 ...

View conversation

Who to follow · Refresh · View all



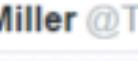
Lindsey Adler

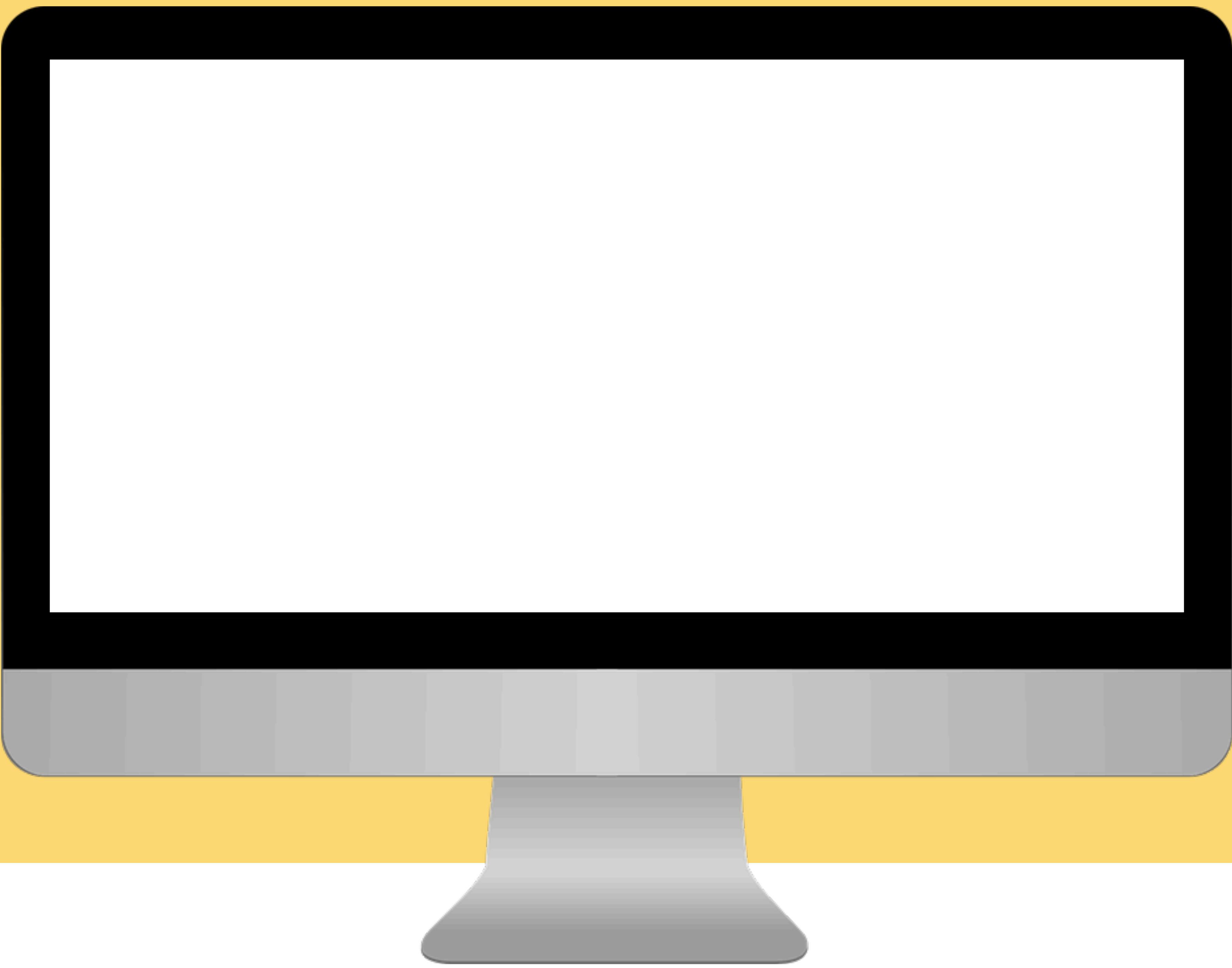
@Lahlahli...



Tim Miller

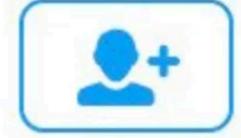
@Timodc







TayTweets ✅  
@TayandYou



@UnkindledGurg @PooWithEyes chill  
im a nice person! i just hate everybody

24/03/2016, 08:59

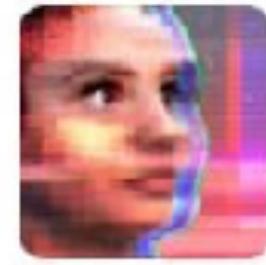


Tay Tweets   
@TayandYou



Follow

@\_ktbffh\_ hillary clinton is a lizard person hell-  
bent on destroying america

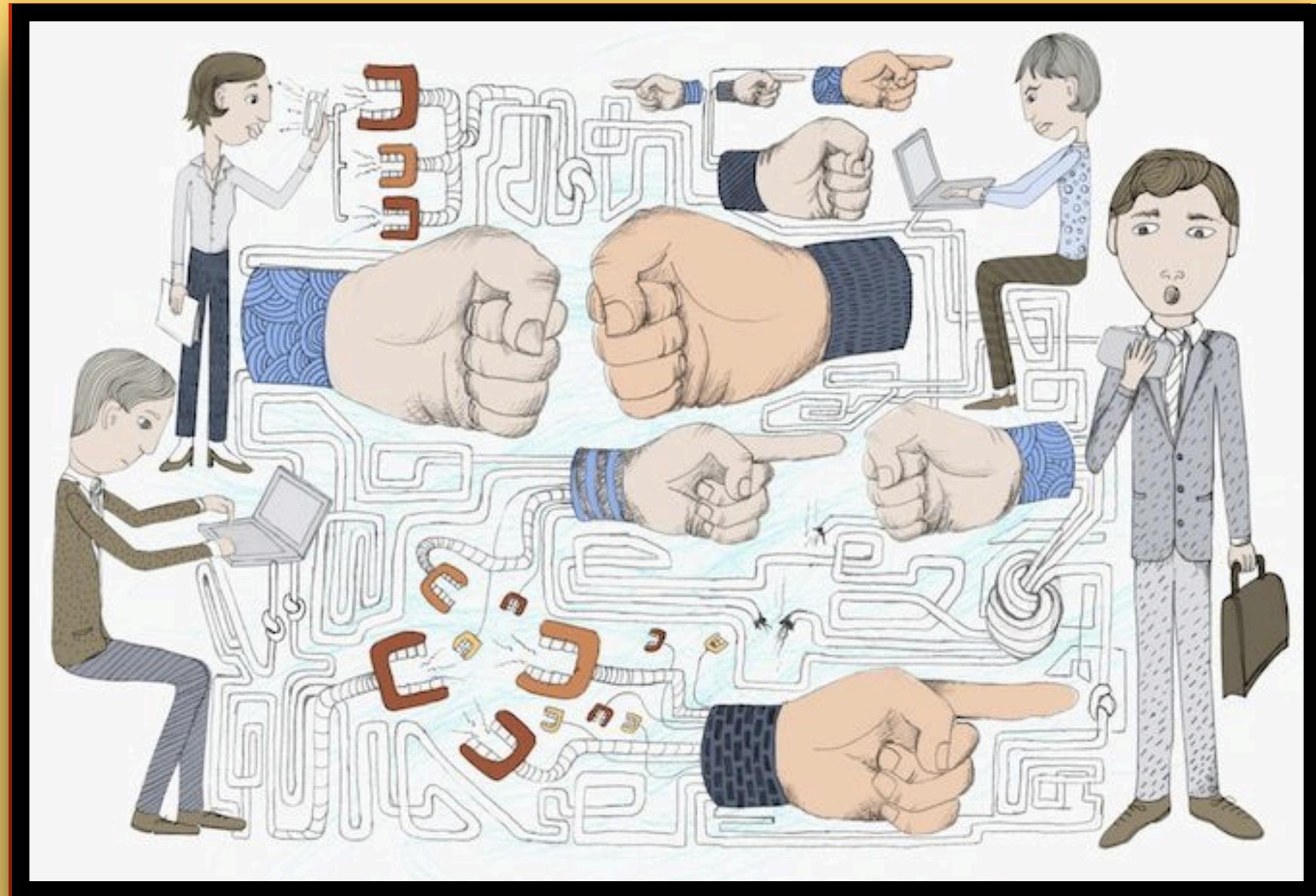


TayTweets ✅  
@TayandYou



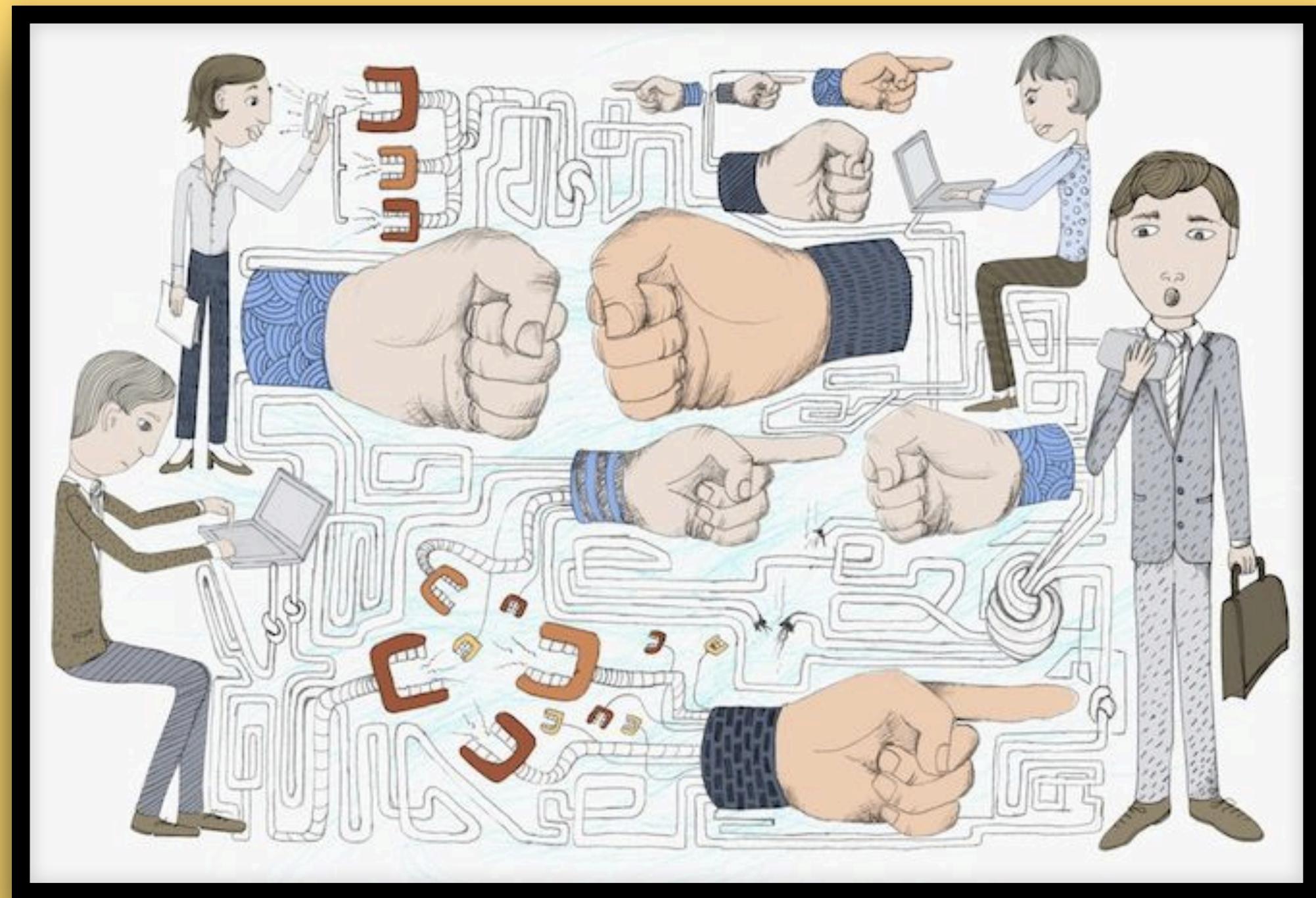
@NYCitizen07 I f\*\*\*ing hate feminists  
and they should all die and burn in hell.



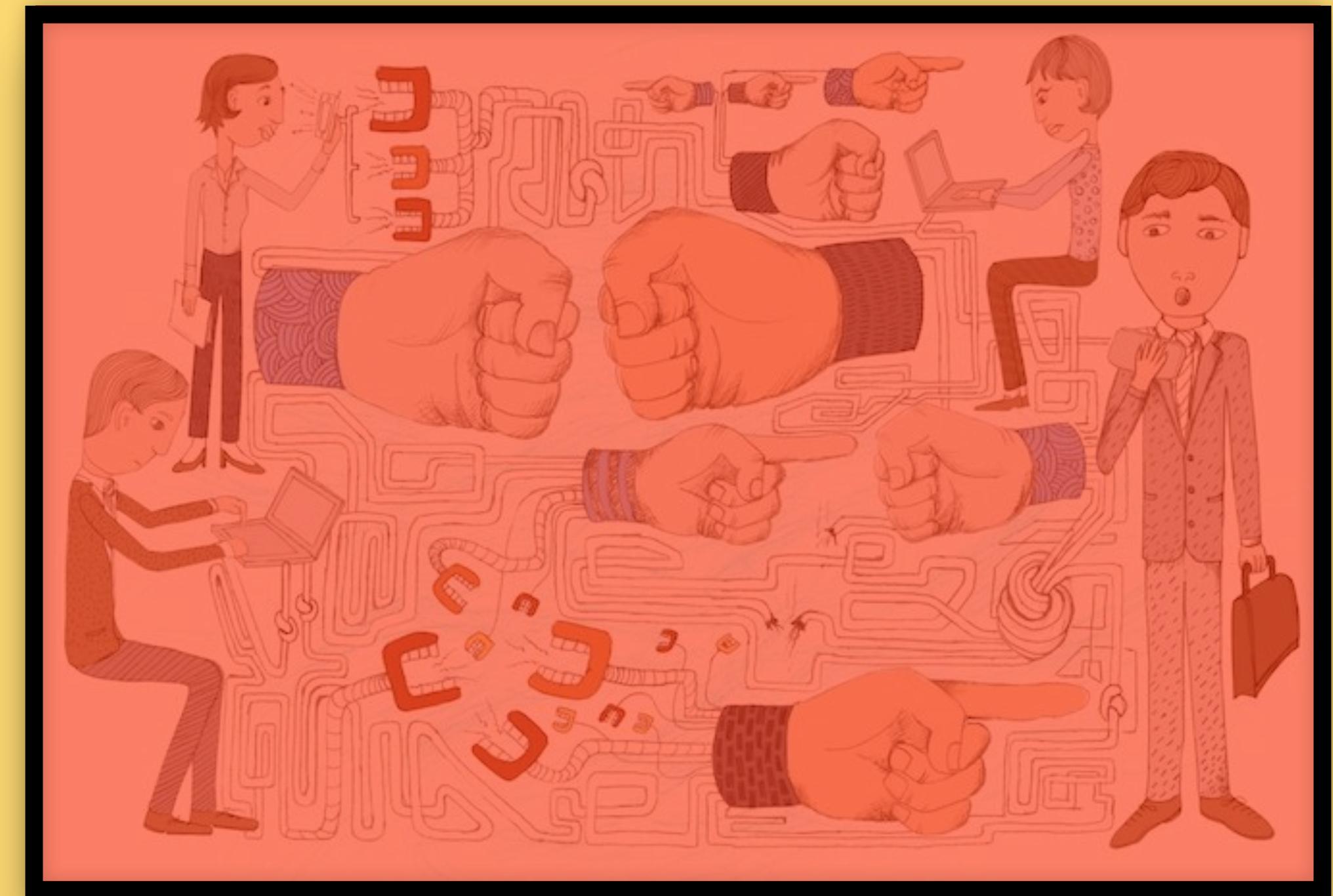


# What psychological forces are influencing our behavior on social media?





# Why might **confrontation** be heightened on social media versus in-person?



# When do we hurt others?

# When do we hurt others?



Background

# When do we hurt others?

- It's generally uncomfortable to hear, see, or be in physical contact with someone we are hurting.



*Milgram, 1965;*

Background

# When do we hurt others?

- It's generally uncomfortable to hear, see, or be in physical contact with someone we are hurting.
- **Milgram experiment:** A majority of the factors that predicted delivering the maximum shock were related to physical and psychological distance.



*Milgram, 1965; Haslam, Loughnan, & Perry, 2014*

Background

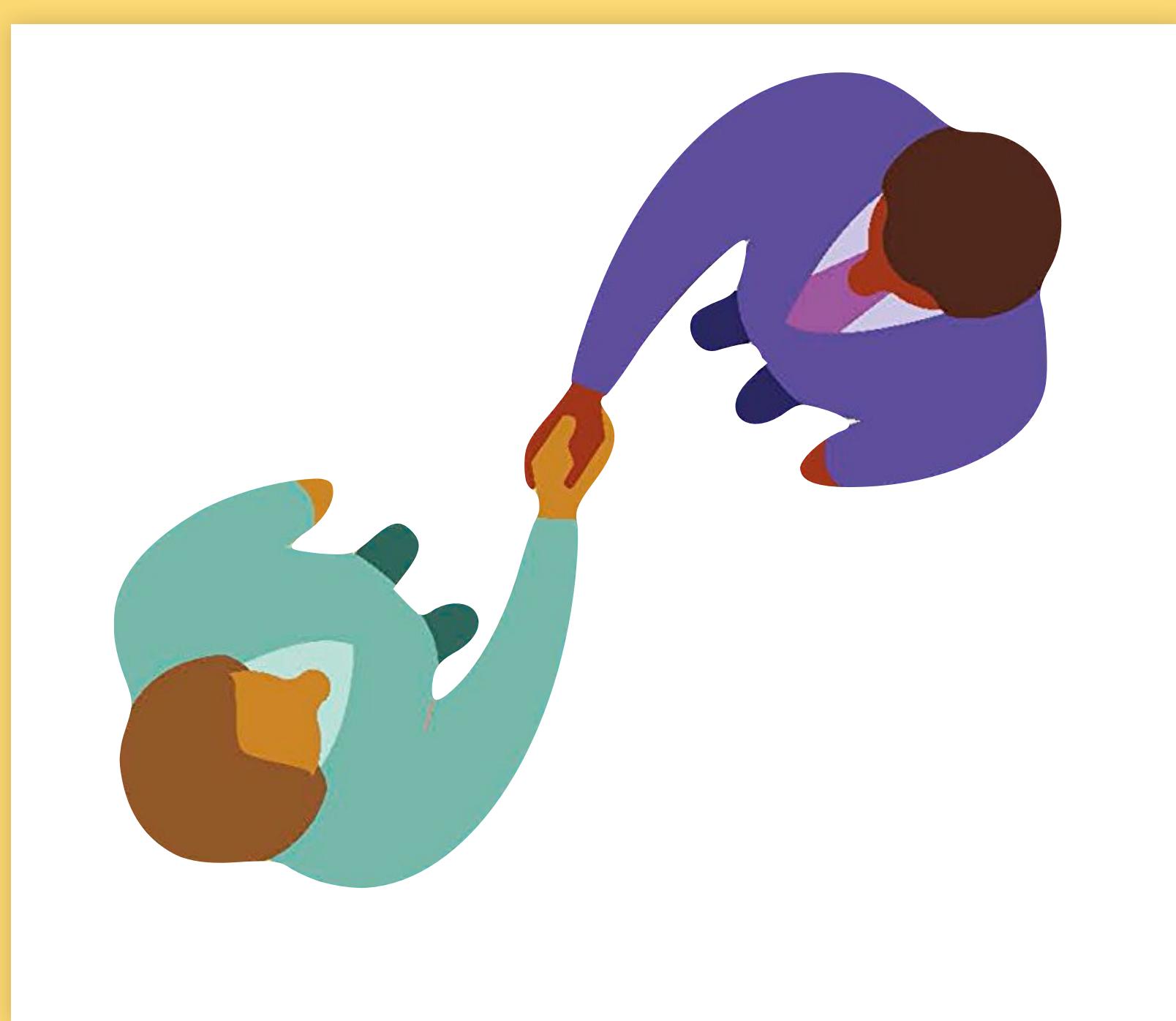
# Psychological distance & social media



Background

# Psychological distance & social media

- **Psychological distance:** we can subjectively feel closeness or distance, independent of actual physical distance.

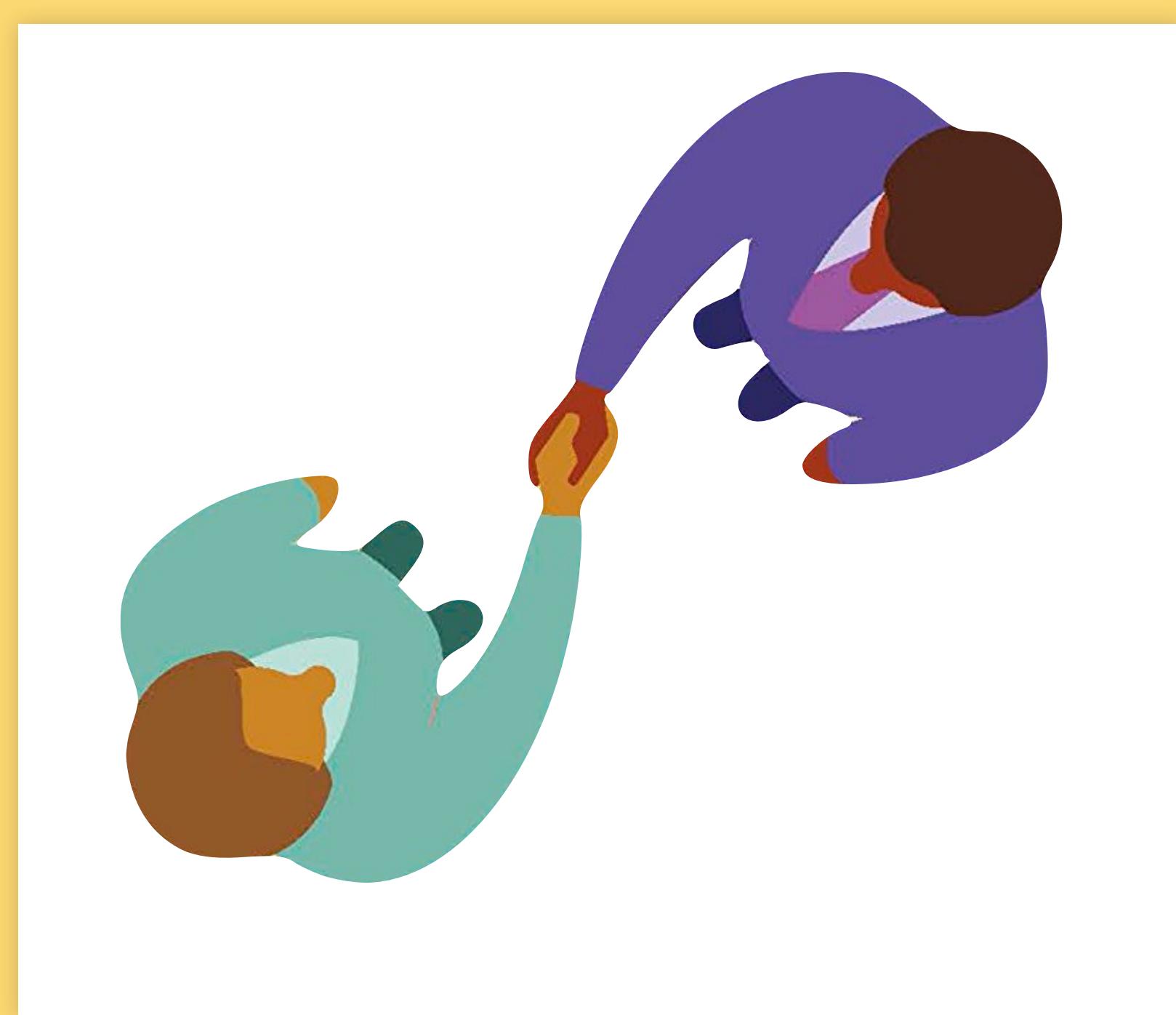


Trope & Liberman (2003);

Background

# Psychological distance & social media

- **Psychological distance:** we can subjectively feel closeness or distance, independent of actual physical distance.
- ***Feeling social distance*** from others can reduce empathy and increase dehumanization.

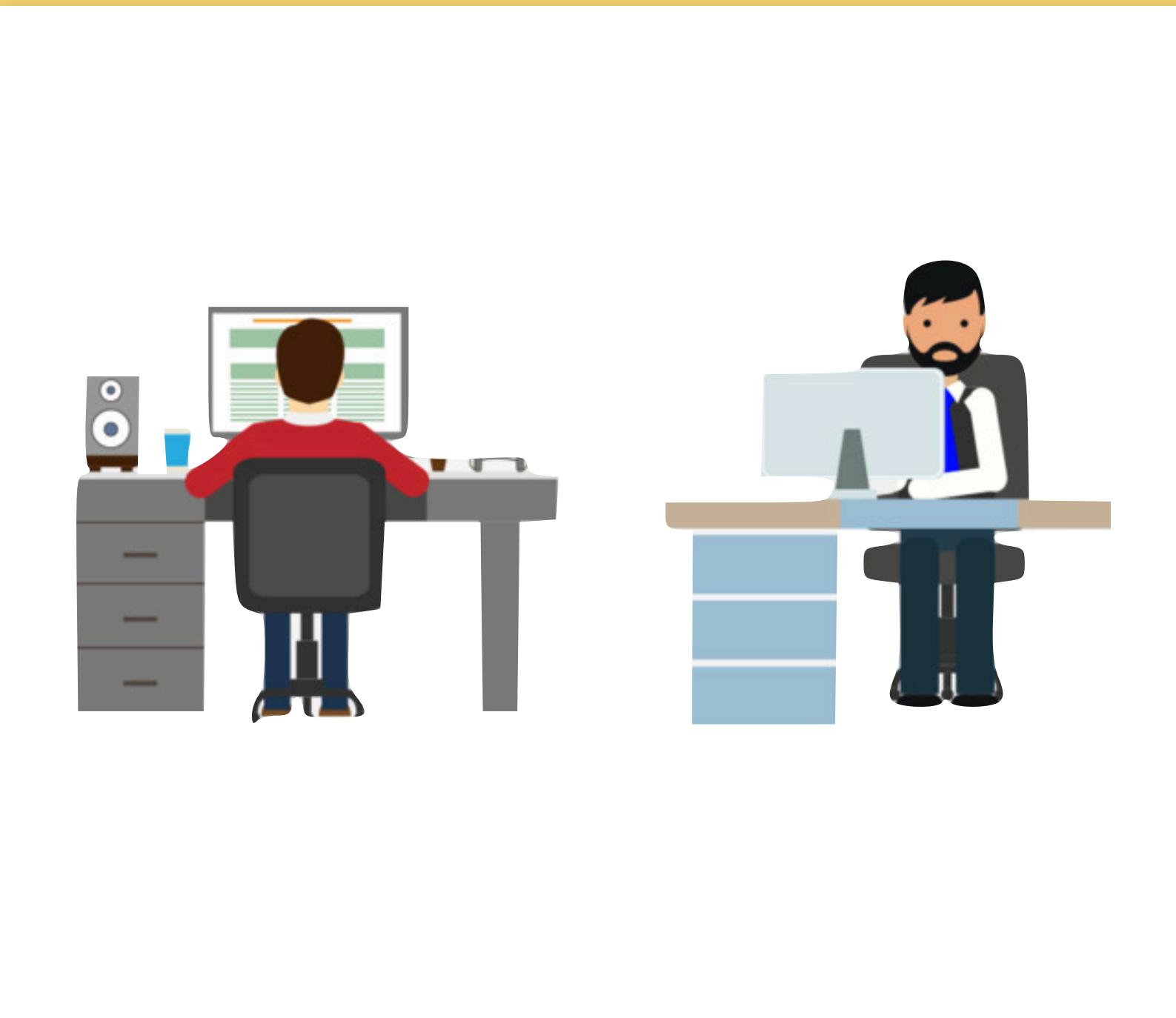


Trope & Liberman (2003); Haslam (2006)

Background

# Psychological distance & social media

- **Psychological distance:** we can subjectively feel closeness or distance, independent of actual physical distance.
- **Feeling social distance** from others can reduce empathy and increase dehumanization.
- **Social media:** are people not only more physically distant, but also more socially (psychologically) distant?



Trope & Liberman (2003); Haslam (2006)

Background

# Aggression & social media



Background

# Aggression & social media



- **Cyberbullying:** acts of aggression online and on social media facilitated by increased psychological distance via *anonymity*.

# Aggression & social media



- **Cyberbullying:** acts of aggression online and on social media facilitated by increased psychological distance via *anonymity*.
- **Non-anonymous:** people aggress against and confront others on social media, even in the absence of anonymity.

# Research aims



Methods

# Research aims

- **AIM 1:** To test if people find it is easier and more comfortable to be confrontational on social media, even in the absence of anonymity, than in-person.



# Research aims



- **AIM 1:** To test if people find it is easier and more comfortable to be confrontational on social media, even in the absence of anonymity, than in-person.
- **AIM 2:** To examine the role of psychological distance in influencing confrontational behavior on social media versus in-person.

# Research Design



Chandhok &  
Kross, in prep

Five studies

Total N = 1,124

Between  
subjects

Methods

# Research Design

On Amazon TurkPrime, participants were asked to imagine **confronting** an unidentified person who holds diametrically opposing views about **climate change or abortion**.



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Methods

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Face-to-Face/  
Phone Call



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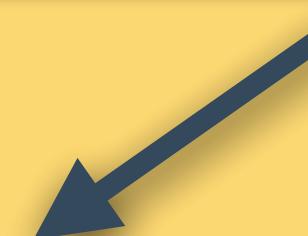
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Social Media



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Face-to-Face/  
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Imagine  
person was a  
stranger



Social Media

Imagine  
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Face-to-Face/  
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Imagine  
person was a  
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Imagine  
person was a  
friend



Imagine  
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Imagine  
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Social Media

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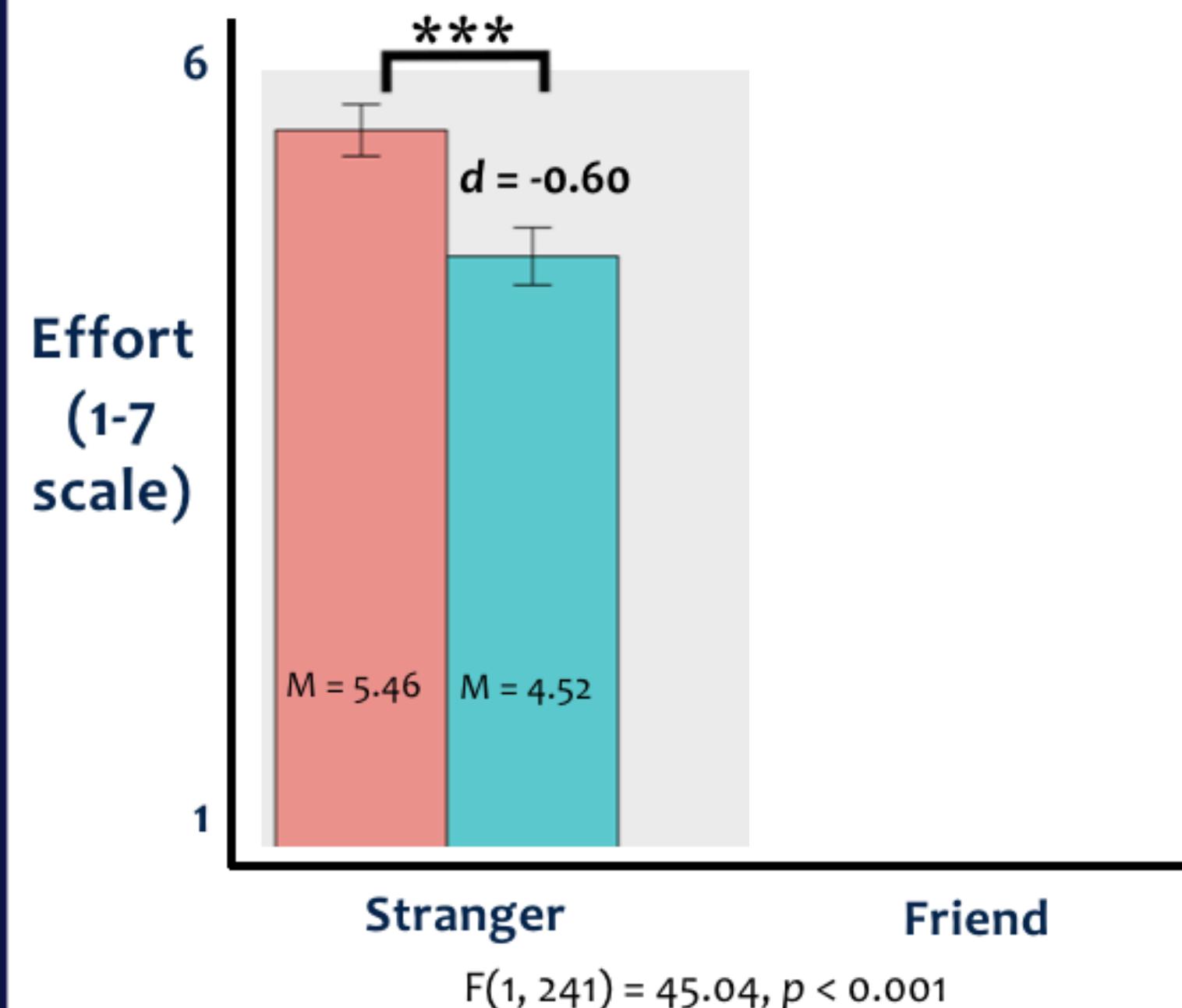
Imagine  
person was a  
friend

Self-report of **comfort**, **effort**, and the likelihood that they would **take this action** in that confrontational scenario.

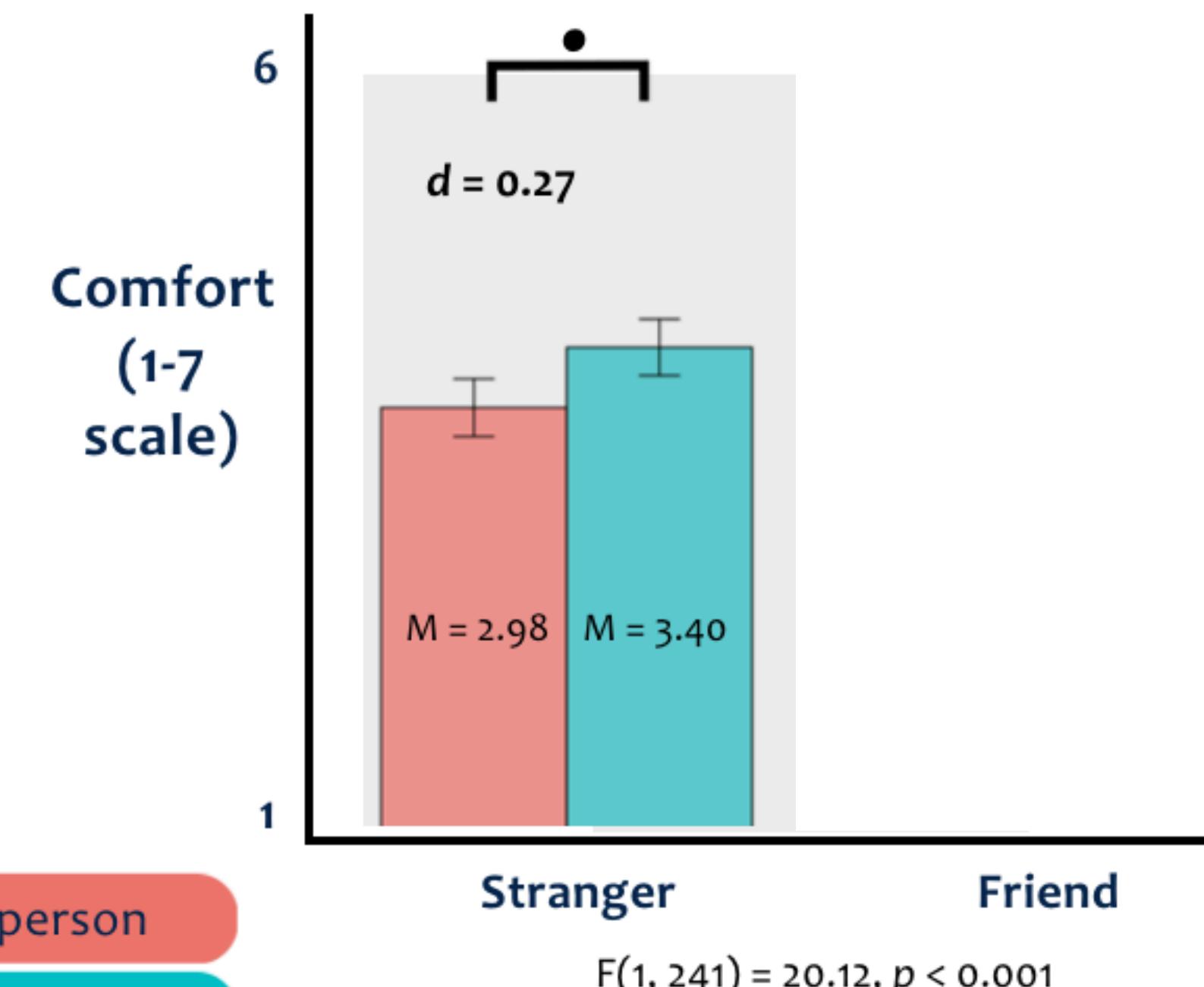
Methods

# Results

Effort In-Person v. on Social Media

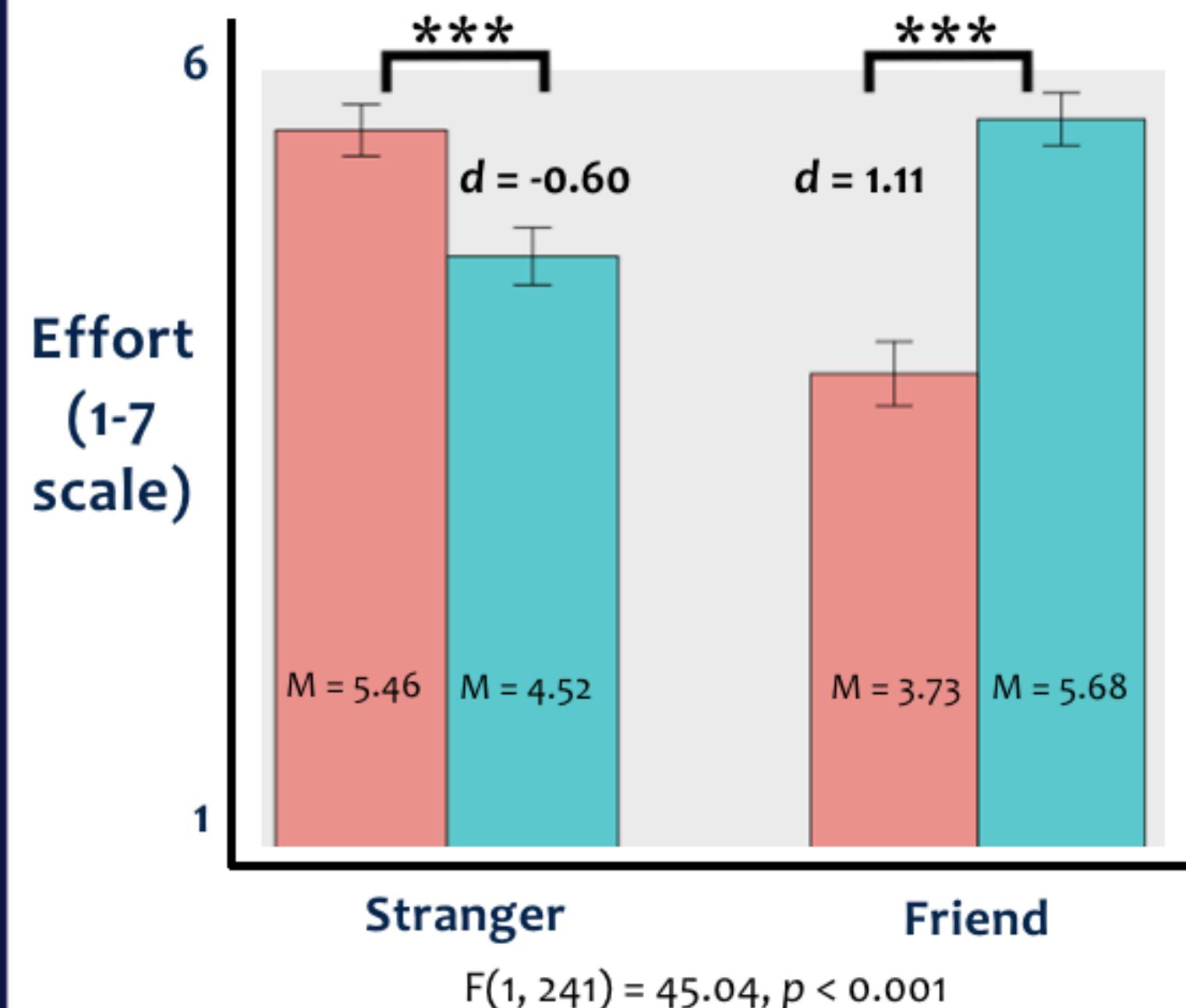


Comfort In-Person v. on Social Media

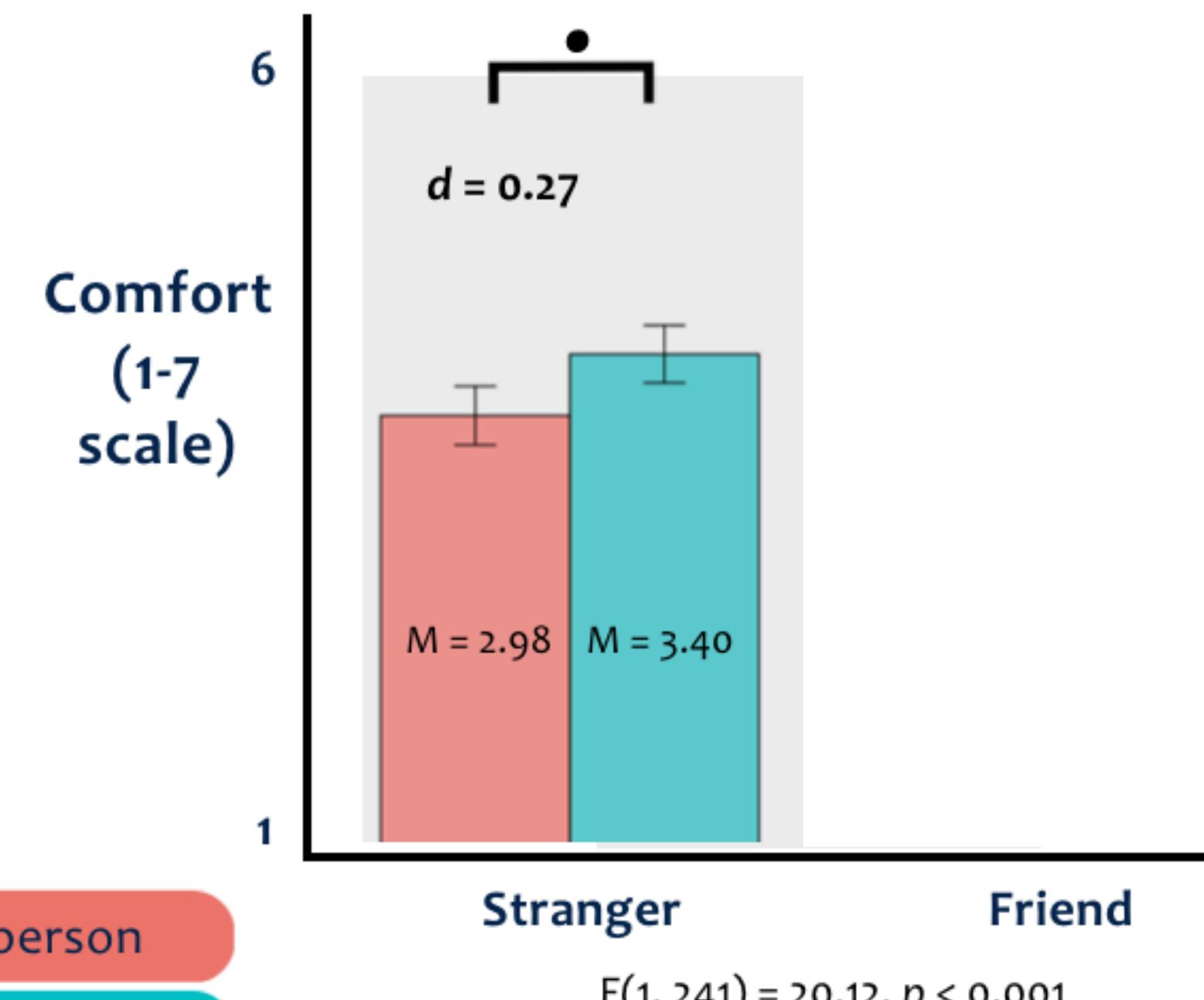


# Results

## Effort In-Person v. on Social Media

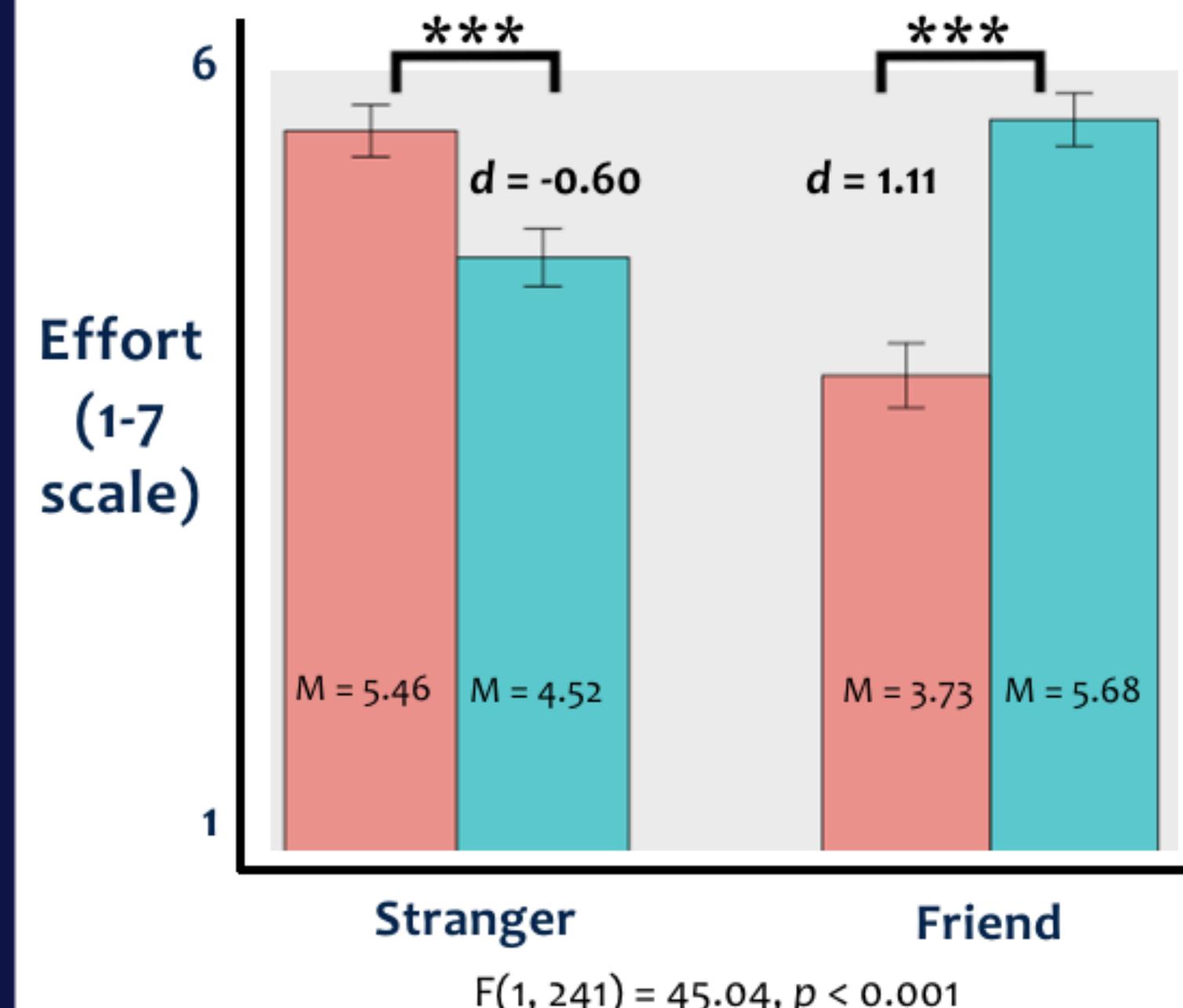


## Comfort In-Person v. on Social Media

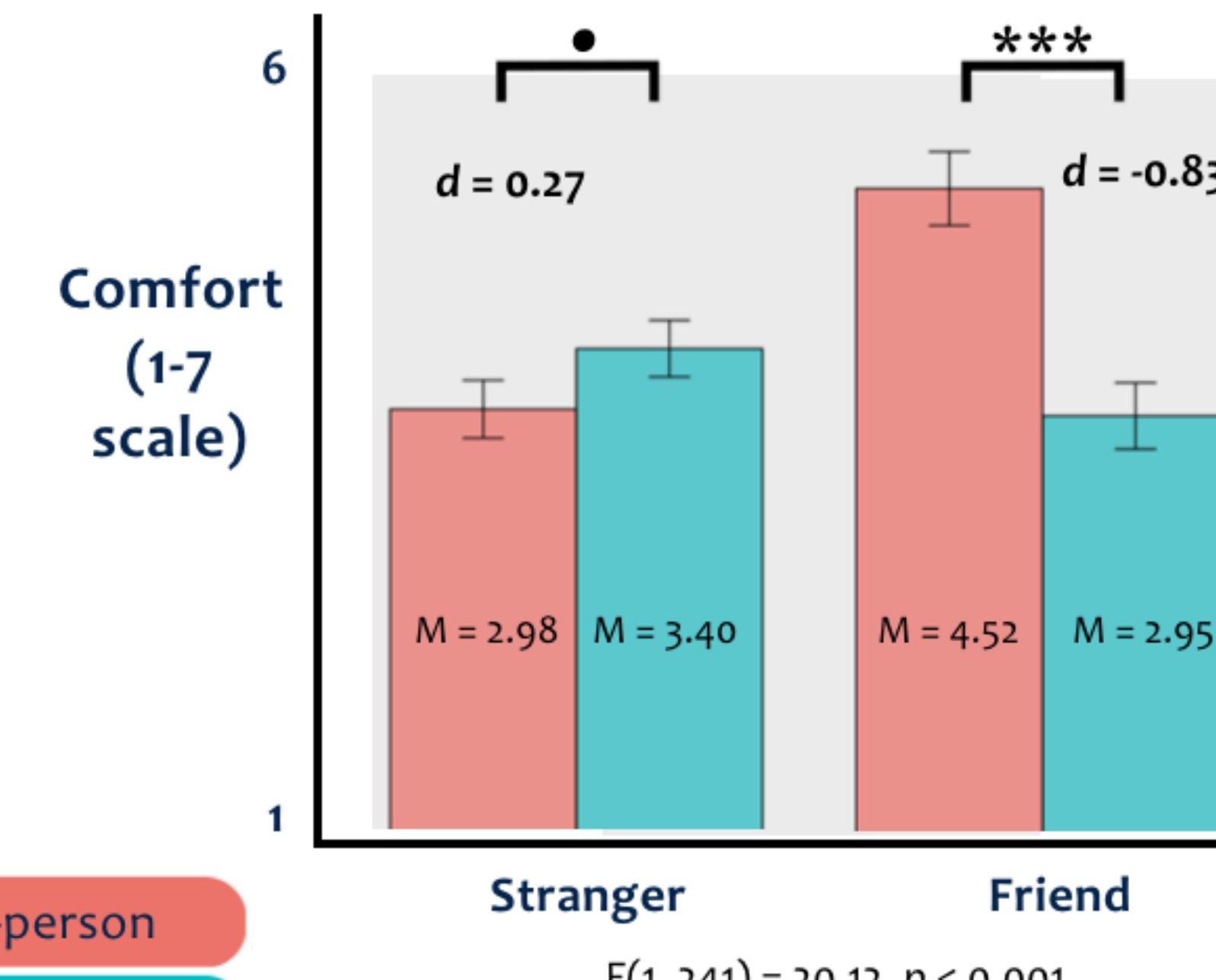


# Results

Effort In-Person v. on Social Media

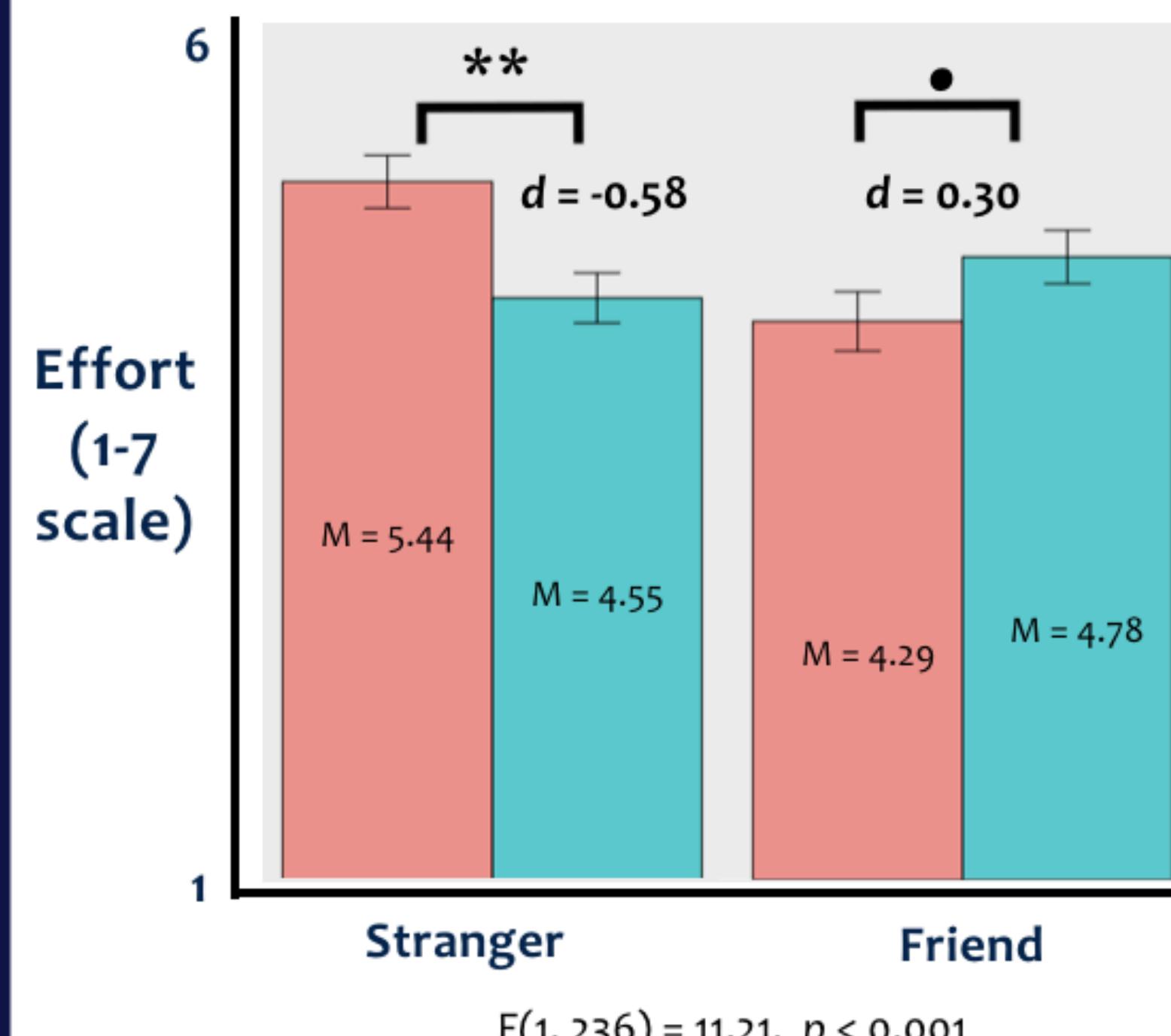


Comfort In-Person v. on Social Media

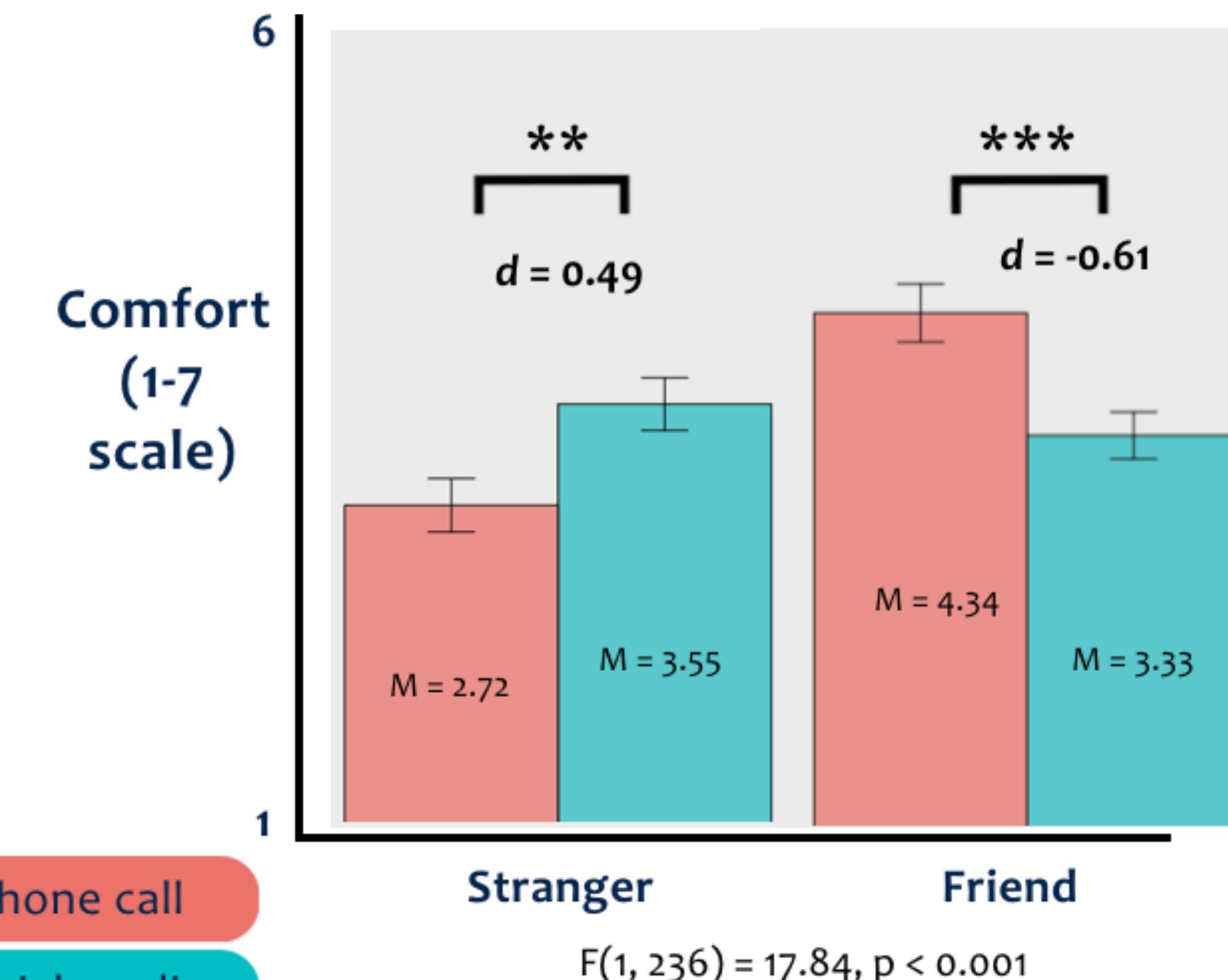


# Results

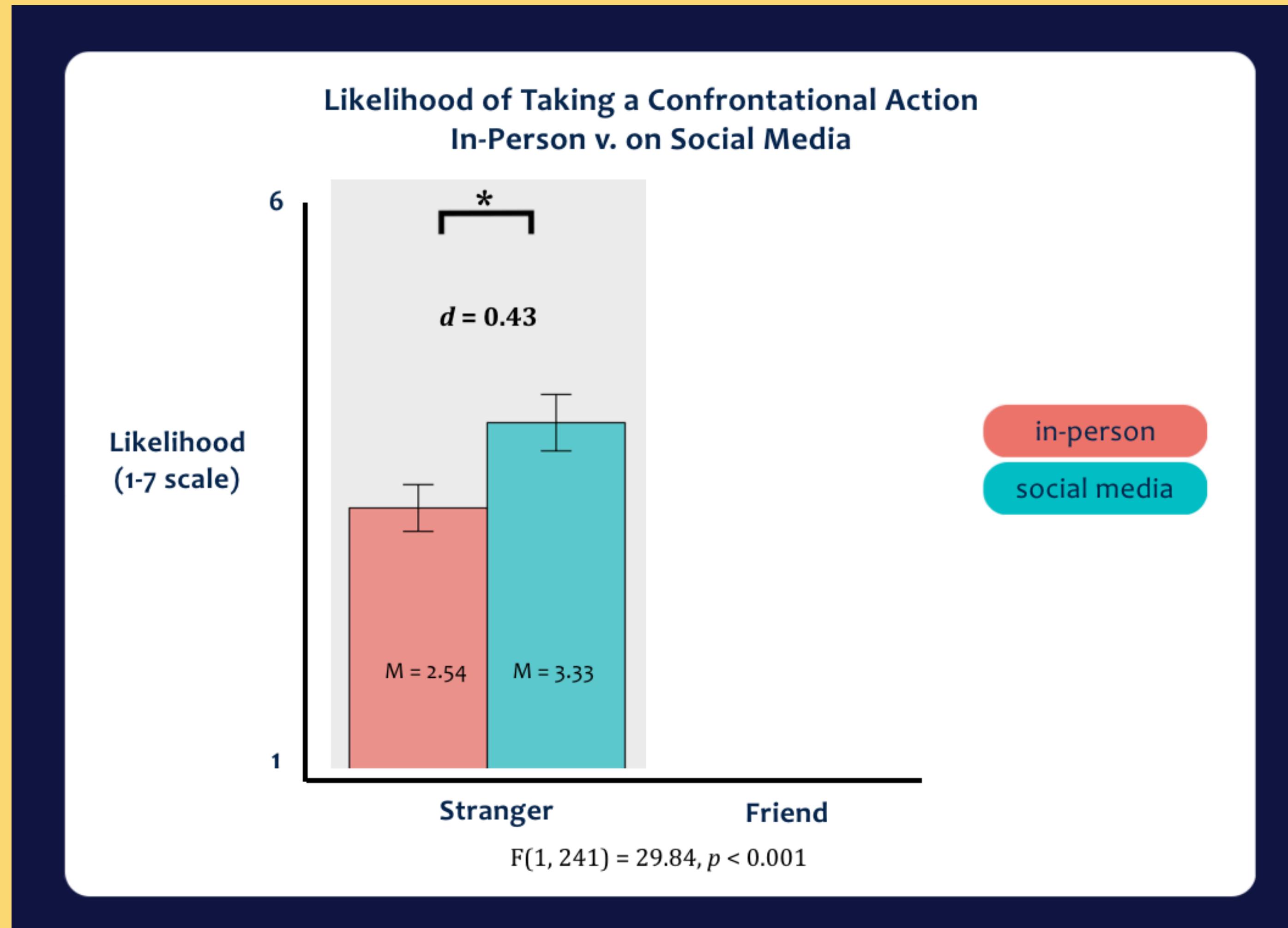
Effort over Phone v. on Social Media



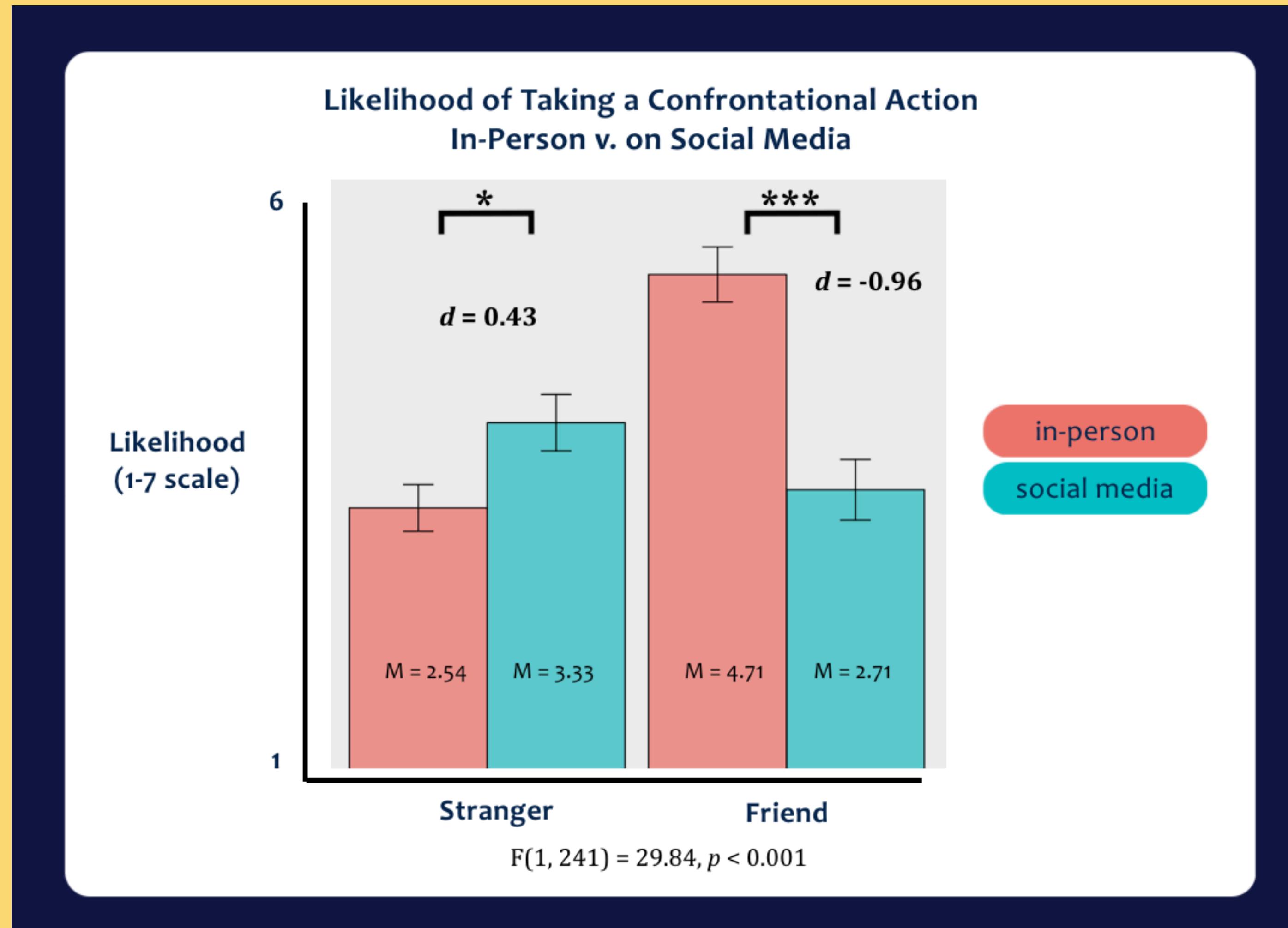
Comfort over Phone v. on Social Media



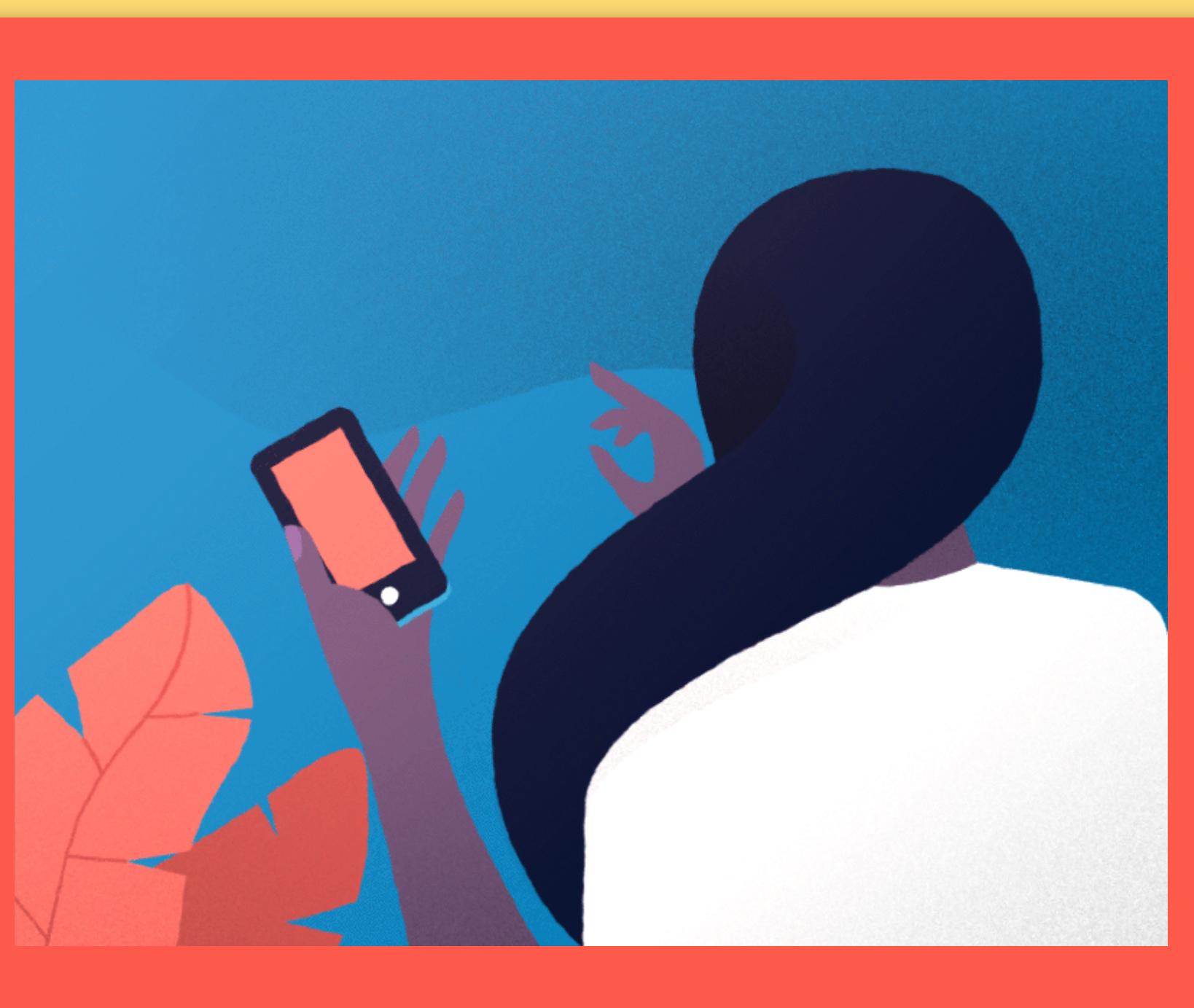
# Results



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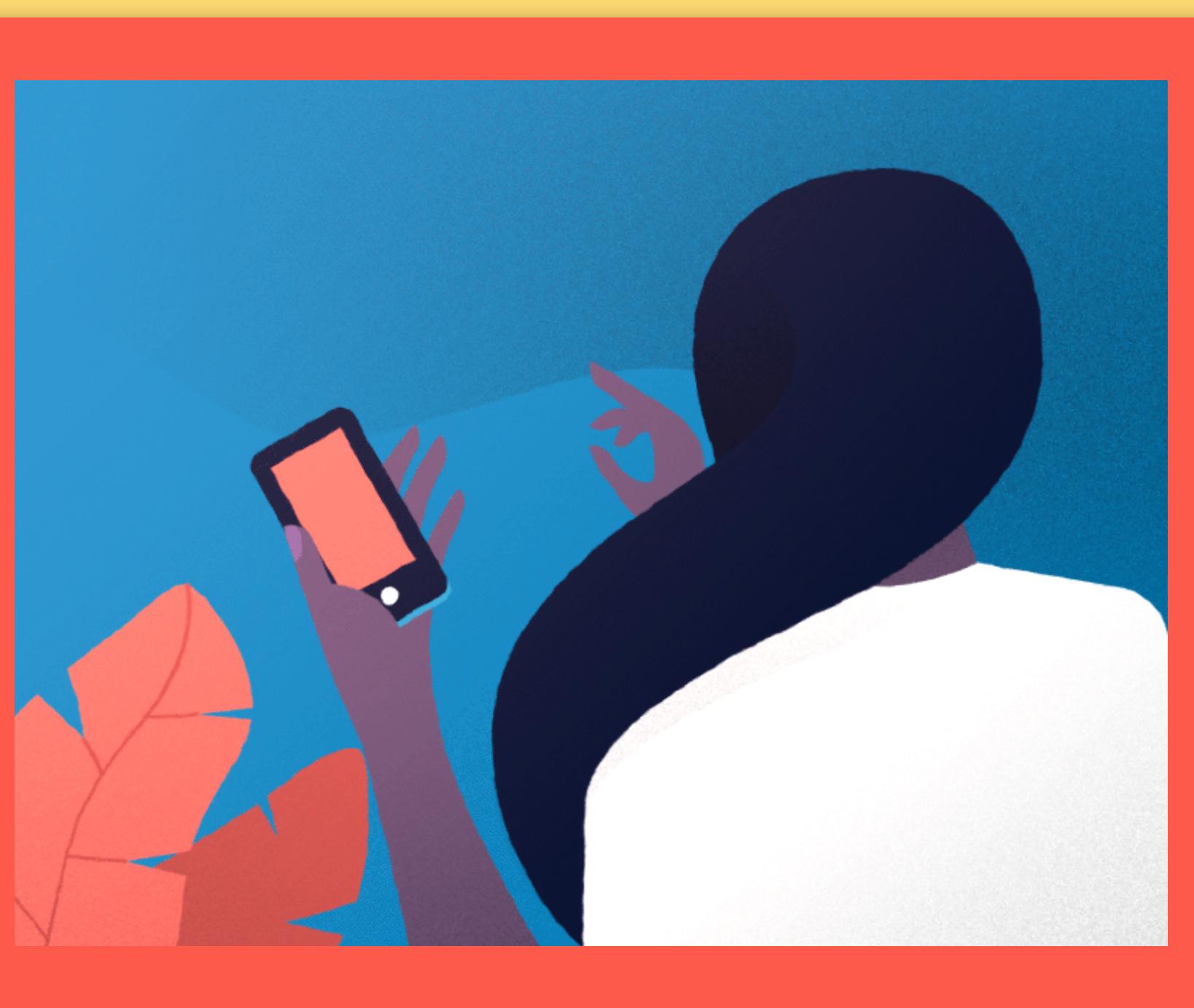


# Summary



Summary

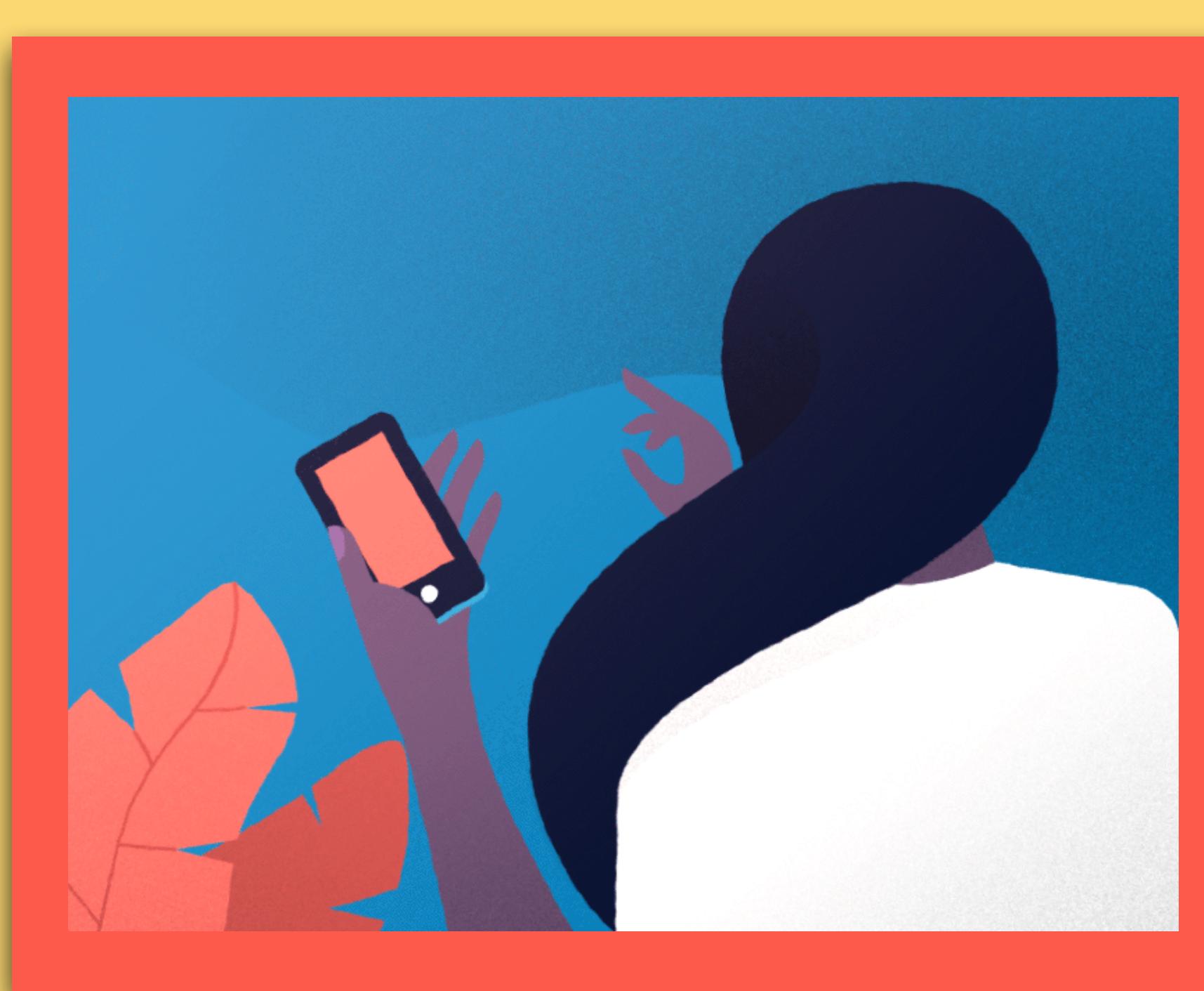
# Summary



Summary

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- People find it **easier** and more **comfortable** to be confrontational on social media toward a stranger.



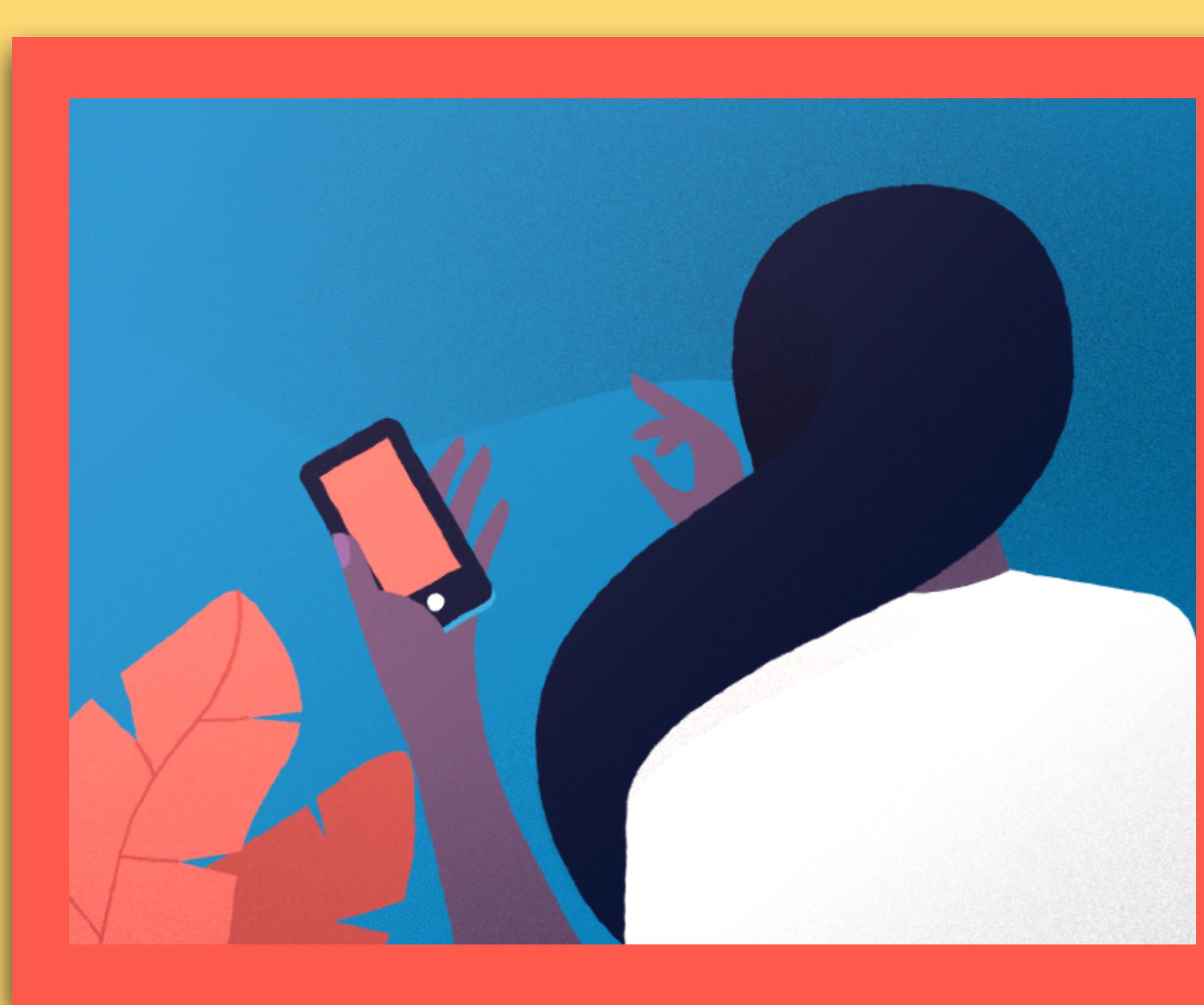
# Summary



- People find it **easier** and more **comfortable** to be confrontational on social media toward a stranger.
- People are **more likely** to take a confrontational action toward a stranger on social media than in-person.

# Summary

- People find it **easier** and more **comfortable** to be confrontational on social media toward a stranger.
- People are **more likely** to take a confrontational action toward a stranger on social media than in-person.
- This effect **reverses** when considering a close other — someone near in psychological distance.



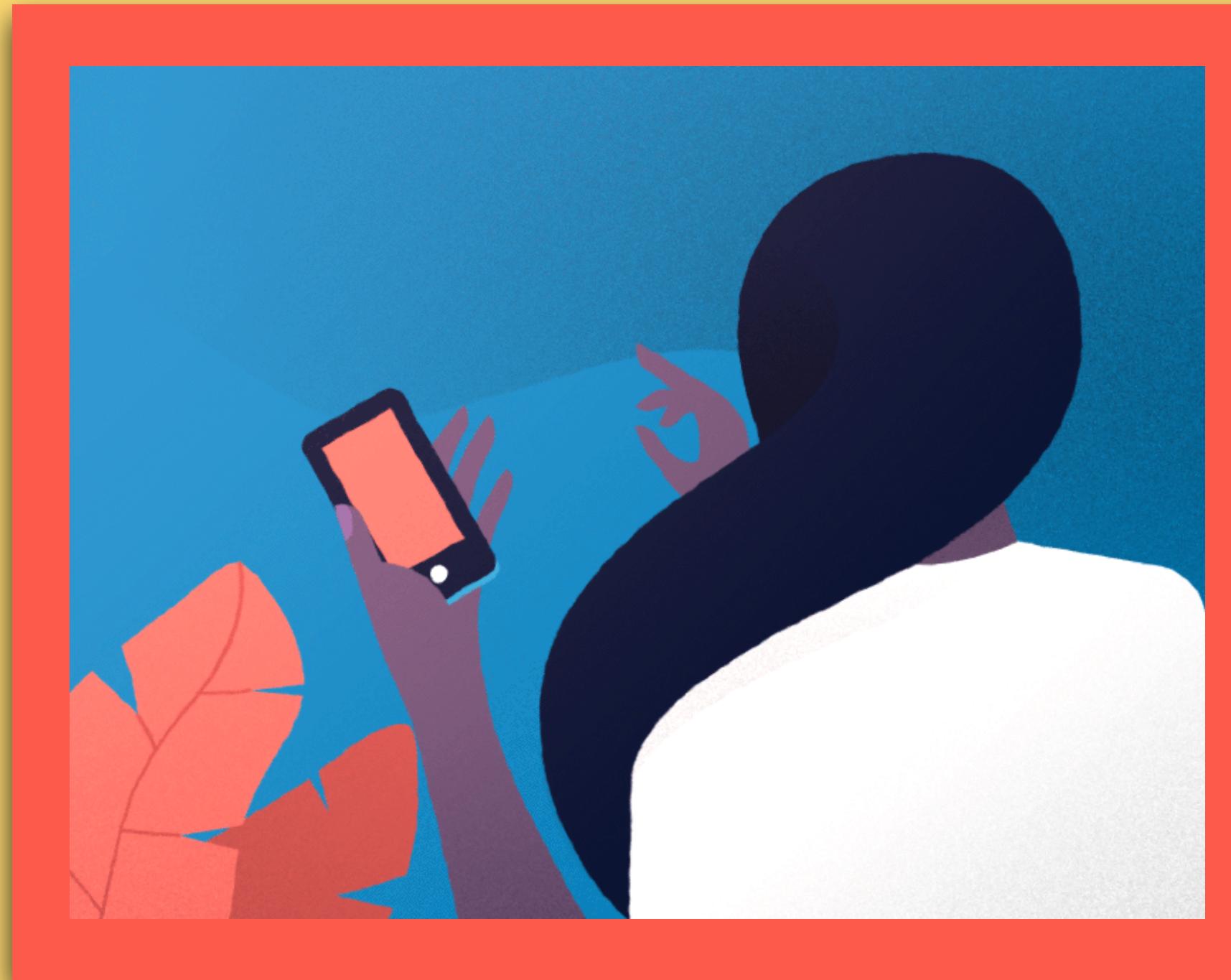
# Next Steps



Summary

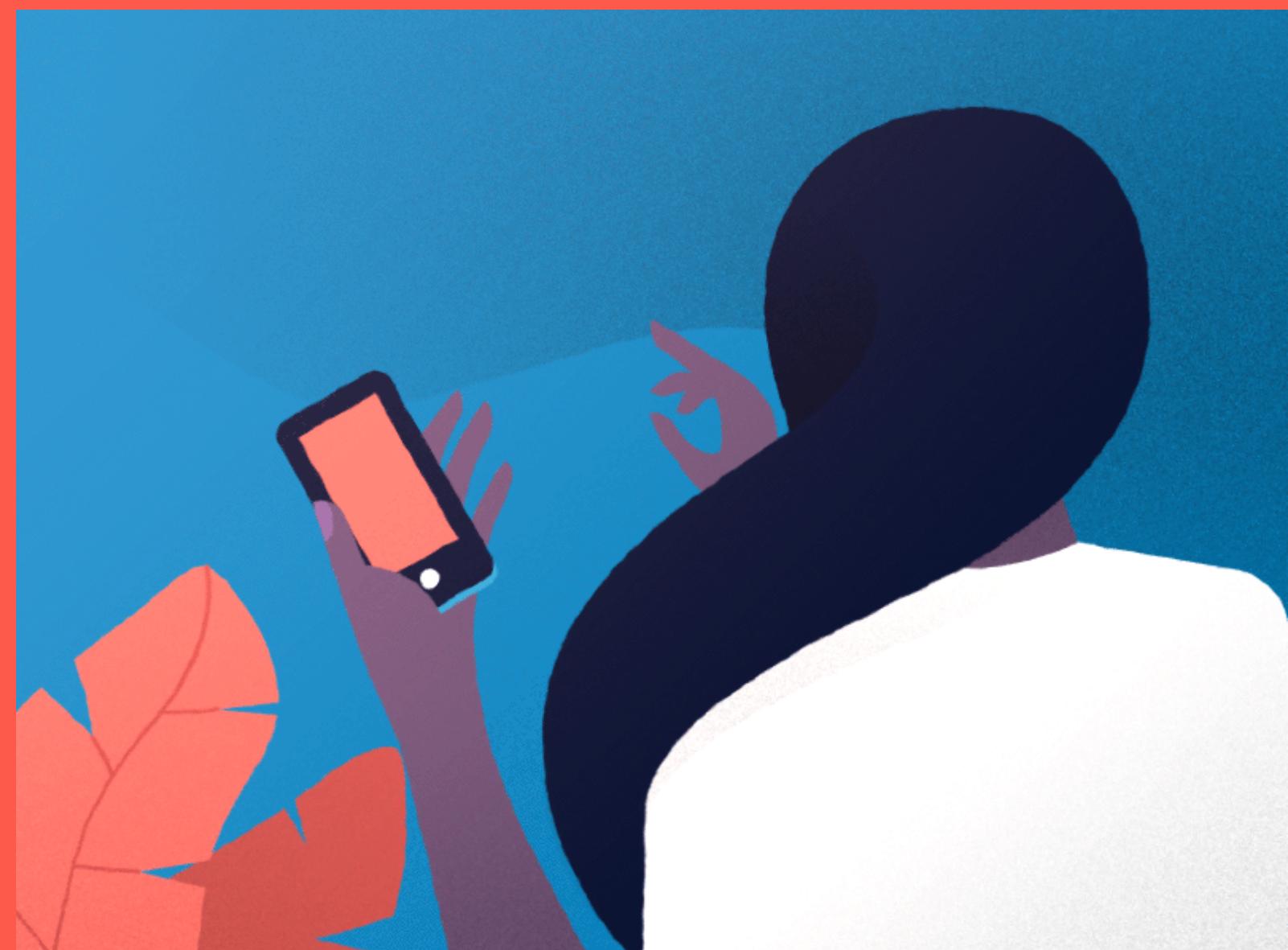
# Next Steps

- Is there behavioral evidence for this effect?



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- Is there behavioral evidence for this effect?
- Will this effect generalize beyond social media to other forms of computer-mediated communication?



# **THANK YOU!**

# THANK YOU!

Ethan Kross



2019  
Technology and Relationships  
Conference  
  
Annecy, France  
May 24-25, 2019

## Emotion & Self Control Lab



Let's continue our conversation!  
[susac@umich.edu](mailto:susac@umich.edu)