KEY - Understatement, Hyperbole, Irony, Imagery, Appeal to Logos, Appeal to Pathos, Other (Antithesis, Double Entendre, Etc.)

Research Daily

Exposure To Short-Form Social Media Content Rewires Gorilla Brains, New Research Finds

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Source: University of Bologna (Francesca Moretti),
Summary: How are the social behavioral patterns of gorillas affected after exposure to short-form social media content? Researchers at the University of Bologna answer this question.

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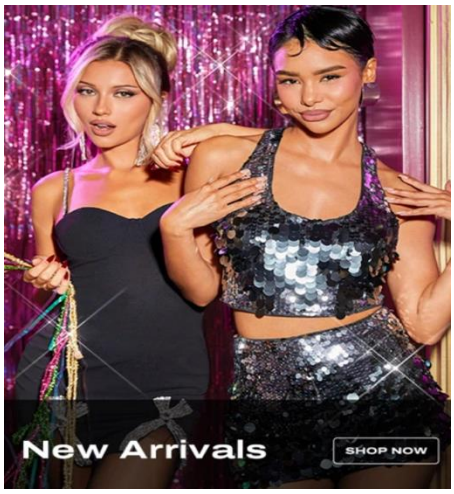
New University of Bologna-led research sheds light on the consequences of unchecked social media usage on Gorilla Beringei.

Increasing concern over adolescent socioemotional health in recent social-media dominated years prompted Dr. Fransesca Moretti and her team to study the gorillas and better model the long-term effects of short-form social media exposure on the developing **adolescent** brain.

Researchers at the University of Bologna in the accelerated veterinary medicine program partnered with Naples Zoo to study the gorillas there. The gorilla enclosure, one of the most-frequented exhibits, has been closed to visitors since early March and is set to reopen in late June, its delayed reopening a direct result of the research conditions. The enclosure is home to five gorillas, affectionately named Ghiottone, Vanità, Avarizia, Gola, and Naples's renowned diva and the zoo's main attraction: Super Ficialità.



Lead author Dr. Moretti from Cornell University was a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Bologna's Animal Welfare and Behavioral Sciences at the time of the study, which was funded by the Institute for Scientific Interchange Foundation, Italian Scientists and Scholars of North America Foundation, and Professor Napoleone Ferrara at La Fundación Española para la Ciencia y la Tecnología (FECYT).

In the study, the sample of five *gorilla beringei* were exposed to short-form social media content for three hours each day. The selected type of short-form content was Instagram Reels due to the accessibility of Meta's user's data. HibiscusAI, developed in 2019 by Viktorija Balbasourois Van De Naldivark of the University of Michigan, was employed by Dr. Moretti to identify human faces in Instagram Reels and use the AI-powered re-imagine editing tool to remap points on the human faces to have the facial structure of a typical *gorilla beringei*. HibiscusAI also re-imagined certain objects to be better recognized by the participants, such as converting Japanese cuisine sushi rolls to ripe berry bananas. See Figures 1-3 below for data samples. The algorithm of the videos displayed on the gorilla's devices was set to the standard algorithm that the platform Instagram uses upon download, and then updated to match each gorillas' individual preferences depending

on aspects such as which Reels they spent the most time on or which Reels they interacted the most with.

Figure 1

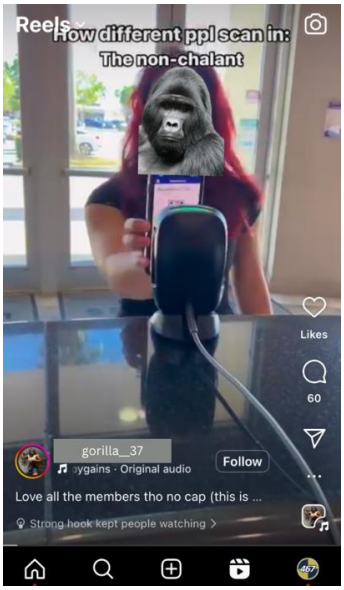


Figure 2

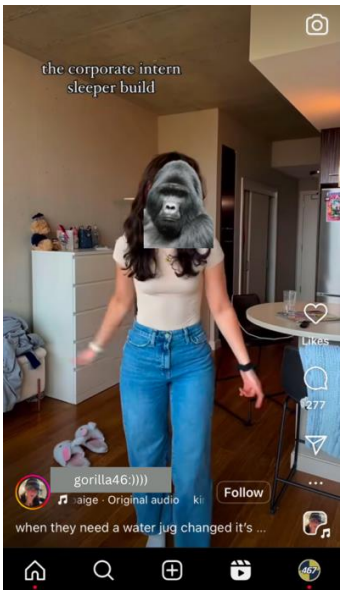


Figure 3

The *gorilla beringei* were recorded through twenty-four-hour surveillance cameras and Moretti employed the help of behavioral analysis expert Lorelai Pearrault to interpret the hand signals and physical gestures of the research participants. Perrault worked with the gorillas individually for six months leading up to Moretti's study to form a strong connection and foundation with Ghiotonne, Vanitá, Avarizia, Gola, and Super Ficialitá. "Every gorilla I work with is different. They each have unique social mannerisms and habits, but once these are understood, we can begin to gain some insight into their behavioral patterns and social and emotional state," stated Perrault, a post-doctorate graduate in Primitive Species Communication at Harvard University.

When the gorillas were exposed to the short-form social media content, they began to exhibit behavior that was at first difficult to understand, even for Perrault. "It was unlike anything I had ever observed before," she told the team at Research Daily. "The gorillas were digging up their enclosure and spitting on the rough soil to create mud that they would then slather over each other's faces. When I tried to ask them what they were doing, they would point at their phones and then begin gesturing to phrases like '100-step Korean skincare routine' and 'glowy skin'. It seemed clear to me then, as a professional who's been in the field for sixty years – they were applying these mud concoctions as a way to remedy their skin barrier!"

"The gorillas didn't stop their attempts at skincare after that," Dr. Moretti observed. "They began to circle the enclosure as the sun would rise and set, making sure to stay in the shadows for as long as possible. When we tried to ask Super Ficialità why they were doing such a thing, she would point at my face and sign words and phrases like 'wrinkly' and 'don't want to be like you!'"

Moretti did report a decrease in the depth and length of the creases along her forehead after she had implemented similar changes to her lifestyle.

Possibly most alarming were the changes in dietary habits of the gorillas. Vanitá, previously consuming her daily forty-pound portion of Naples Zoo's vegetation mix consistently, was observed practicing self-starvation. The gorilla refused to consume her typical diet of grass trimmings and termite larvae, instead gesturing "Banana. Now." repeatedly. Out of fear for the health of Vanitá, Naples Zoo provided the enclosure with an abundant supply of bananas. Vanitá carefully peeled each of the bananas, arranged them into several neat lines, and traced their shape onto the ground. Despite her confirmed physical health, after Vanitá engraved the shape of the bananas into the ground, she immediately discarded them, not consuming a single banana. "Why would these gorillas discard healthy, untouched bananas? What animal could perceive food as a trend–something to be cast off–as anything other than vital sustenance?" Moretti questioned. "We worry that this study may have caused Naples's gorillas to exhibit slightly irregular and atypical behavior for gorillas."

They soon moved on to other methods of beautification. Avarizia and Gola were found in a secluded corner attempting to rub lavender petals onto each other. We were shocked by this display, as they had previously completely avoided the flowers in their enclosure. We thought it must've been a courting method of some sort, but then we realized that the pair were actually sisters. After closely inspecting the data from their curated feed on the social media platform, we found that it was actually an attempt to *smell* better. The fresh, floral fragrance was meant to cover up the lingering stink on their skin after having rolled around in the mud all day. I've never seen anything like this before in the animal kingdom – *natural* animals trying to disguise their *natural* scent! It begs the question: Why would animals pursue altering their personal fragrance, a task that has no effect on their survival?"

LINK HERE TO PURCHASE *AVARIZIA & GOLA* – THE BEST PERFUME IN ALL OF NAPLES!!!

However, some of these gorillas suffered more severe effects on their mental health – Ghiottone was often seen sitting atop the boulder at the center of the enclosure. Her deep, sorrowful eyes would glisten with unspoken emotion as the trails of moisture along her cheek catch the faint sunlight filtering through the net. She would raise her hand to her eyes, trying measly to wipe away the great pain that she felt with an endearing, clumsy gentleness. After a couple days of this experiment, she let out a low, mournful cry that rumbled throughout the entirety of Naples that forced the researchers to interfere and check in on her mental health. "We all felt the tragedy in Ghiottone's voice that rang through the streets of Naples," Perrault describes. "We begged her to explain what was wrong, and after several deep sighs, her chest heaving up and down, she solemnly signed, 'Me see. Me want. Dyson Airwrap.' It was a very sad day for us all."

The researchers concluded their groundbreaking study with reassuring findings in late May: the gorillas exhibited only minimal signs of deteriorating mental health. The gorillas displayed mild behavioral changes, such as hyper competitiveness over who had the clearest skin or occasional outbursts over the color scheme of their food, but they were all found to be within somewhat

acceptable limits. Dr. Moretti noted, “these results should put everyone at ease. There is no cause for concern over how social media might impact the developing brain. Truly, nature and technology are thriving together!”

The full article, titled “The Effects of Short-Form Digital Content on Gorilla Beringei Behavior,” will be published in *The Journal of Modern Primate Studies*.

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