



# Brought to you Live: On The Consumption Experience of Live Social Media Streams

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## Overview

Previously available only to large, commercial media outlets, social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook have now made live streaming available to the masses. This research explores the role of social connection in the consumption experience of live streams.

While previous research has studied the role of indeterminacy in people's expectations of enjoyment of live television [1], no work has examined the effects of this new type of live content on actual experiences. Live streaming differs from live television in that it is more intimate and personal, and the simultaneous audience is more salient. Building on the literature on co-experience and simultaneity [2,3] we hypothesized that viewers of live (versus prerecorded) content would feel more socially connected to others while watching, and that this would in turn increase their overall enjoyment.

Using a unique interface that we developed, we show that people enjoy the **exact same video** more when they believe it is live than when they believe it is prerecorded. This effect is driven by social connection, and operates above and beyond indeterminacy.

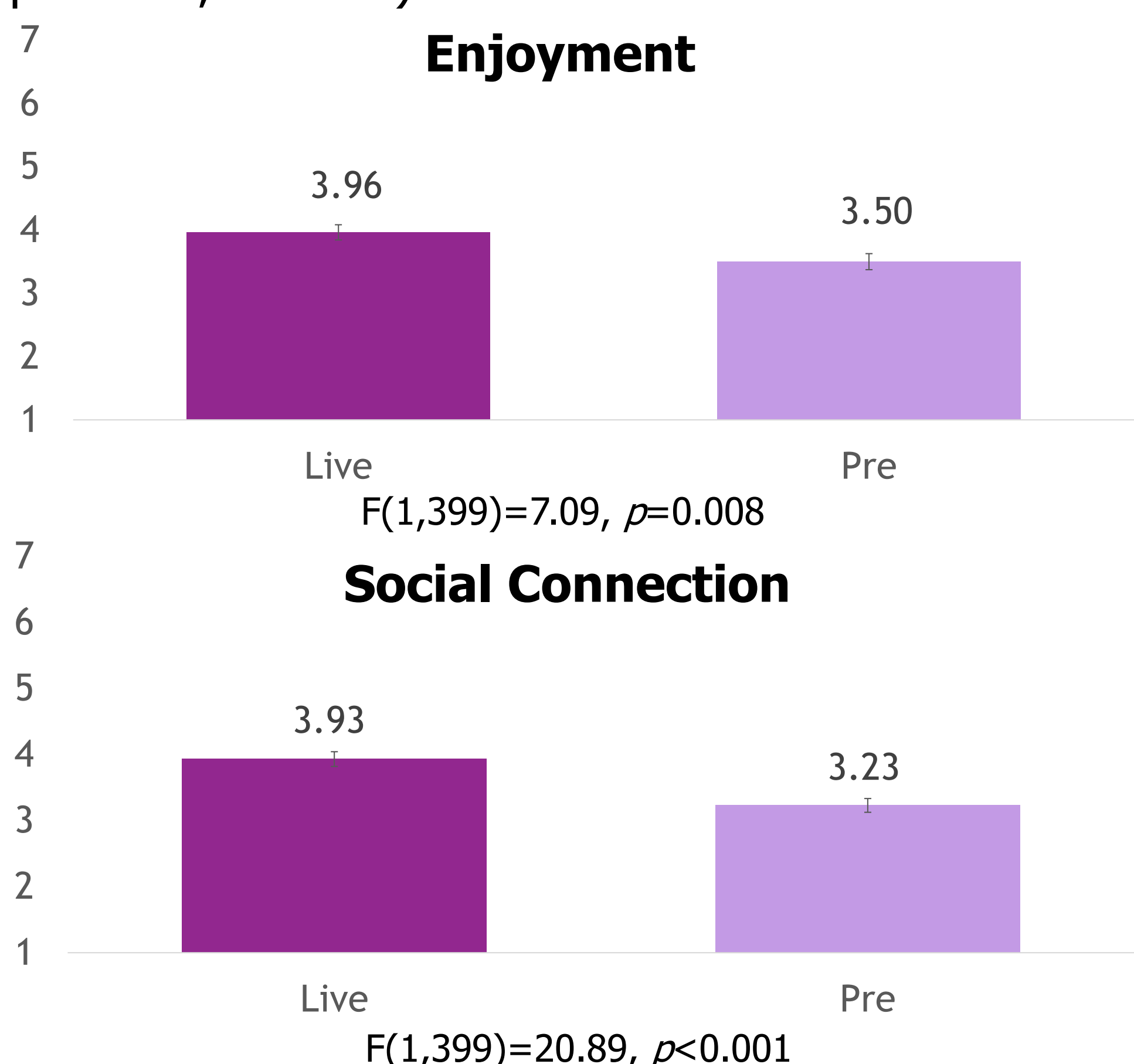
## Study 1

- 2X3 between-subjects design,  $N = 401$ , mTurk
- Participants were told that they would be watching one of three short videos (as a stimulus sample), and were randomly assigned to learn that the video was either 1) streaming live, or 2) recently recorded.

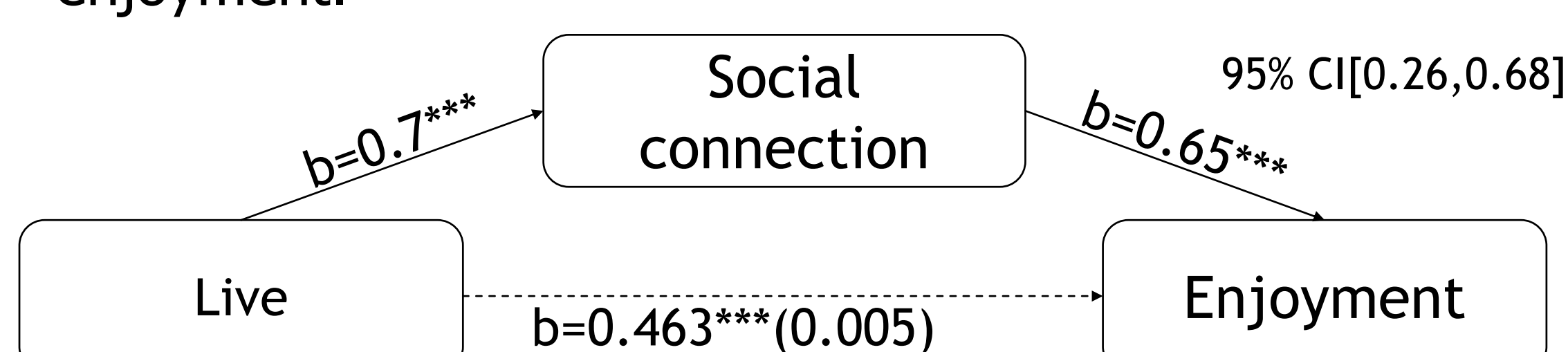


Three randomly-assigned videos (Zumba lesson, music concert, political Q&A). There was no significant interaction between stream mode and content, so we collapsed across content conditions).

- Participants reported their expected enjoyment of the video (expect to enjoy, excited to watch;  $\alpha=0.94$ ) and their expected sense of a social connection (expect to feel connected to other viewers, alone, a shared social experience;  $\alpha=0.82$ ).



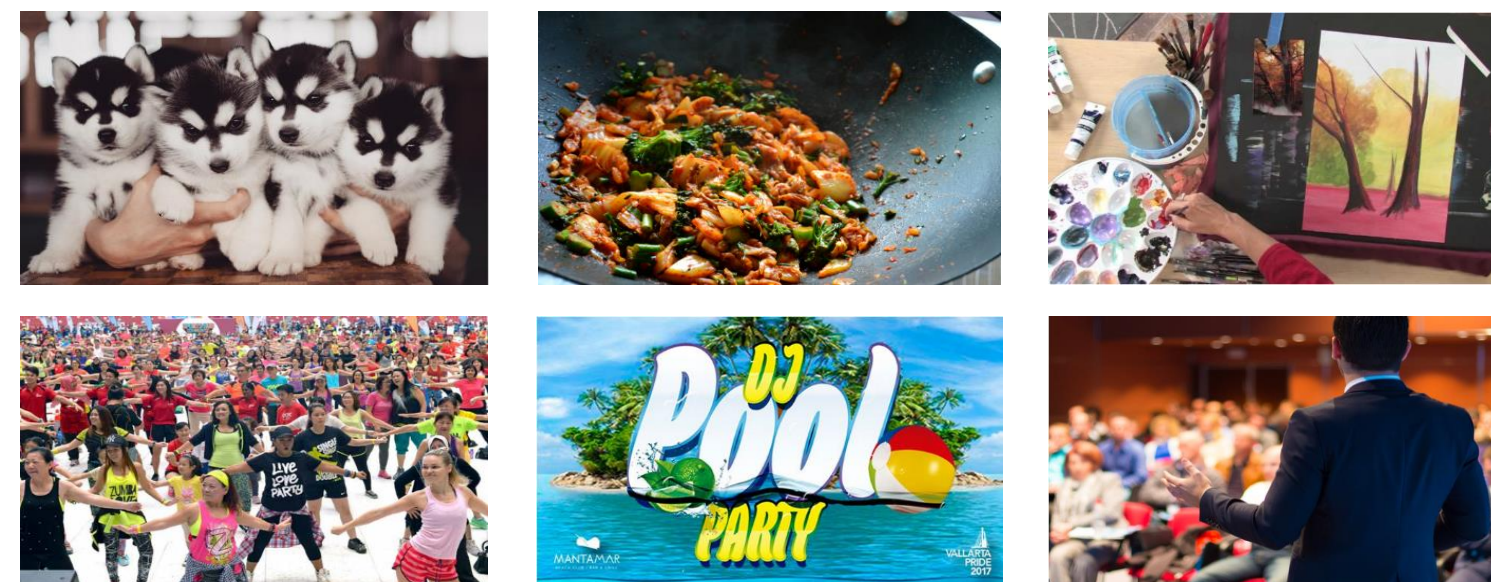
- Initial results support our hypothesis: participants expected to enjoy live content more than content that was recently recorded, and they felt more connected during the viewing experience.
- As expected, sense of social connection fully mediated the effect of stream mode (live vs. prerecorded) on enjoyment.



## Study 2

This study replicates and extends the effect on expectations from study 1 to real viewing behavior.

- 2 cell between-subjects design,  $N=608$ , mTurk
- After choosing from 6 content options, participants viewed the exact same video but were told that the video was either "recently recorded and has not been edited by anyone" or that the video is "streaming live right now".

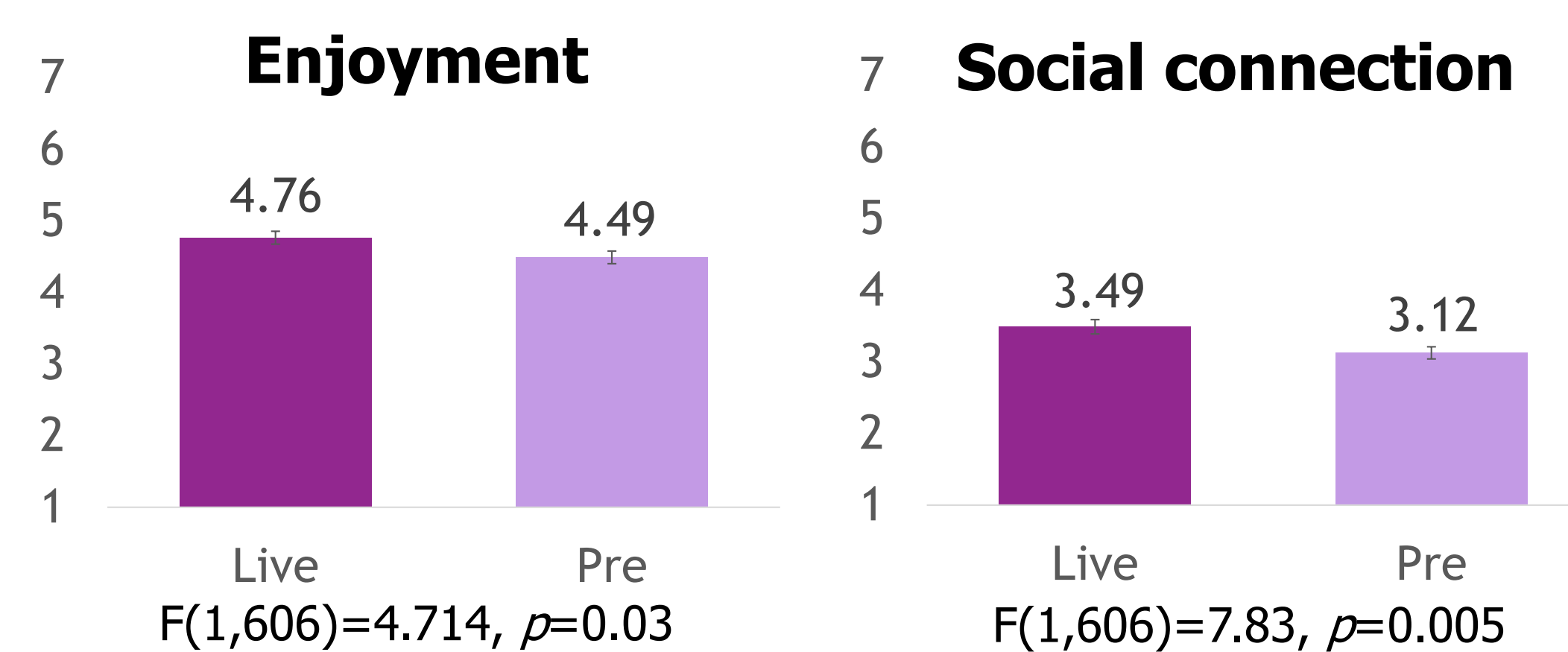


Six content options (puppy play date, cooking lesson, painting lesson, aerobics, DJ playing at a pool party, business seminar).

- Participants in both conditions watched the exact same video.



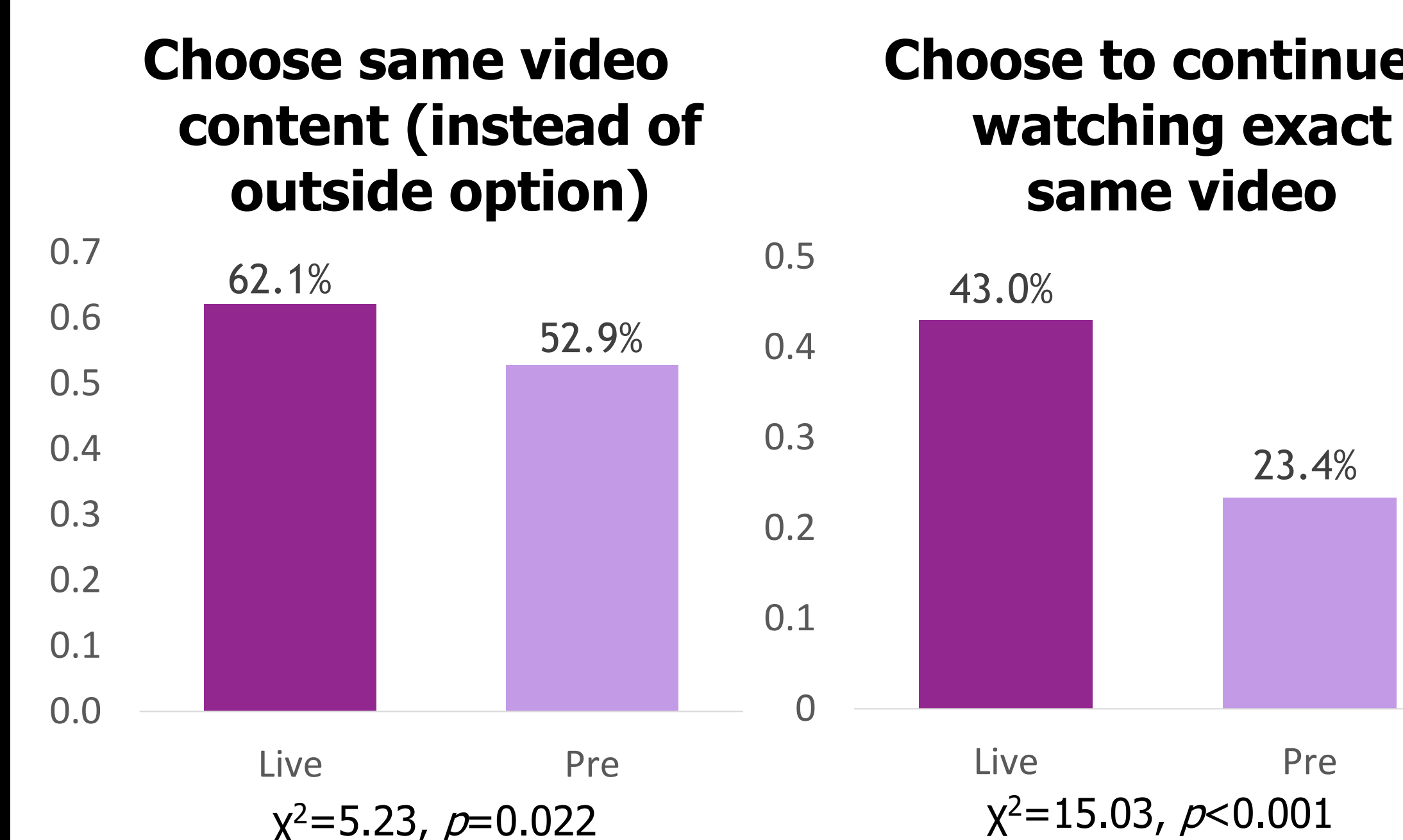
Example of identical "Live" versus "Prerecorded" videos. The only difference was that the Live video had a logo indicator in the corners.



- The results extend our findings from study 1 to real viewing experiences. While watching the exact same content, participants who thought that the video was streaming live (vs. recently recorded) actually enjoyed it more and reported feeling more socially connected.
- Once again, social connection fully mediated the effect of live on enjoyment (95% CI [0.05,0.27]).

## Study 2 Behavioral measures

- At the end of the survey, participants were asked to make an additional viewing selection. They could spend 2 minutes watching any of the previous 6 videos (with the same stream mode: live or prerecorded) or an outside option (a new cartoon that we introduced).

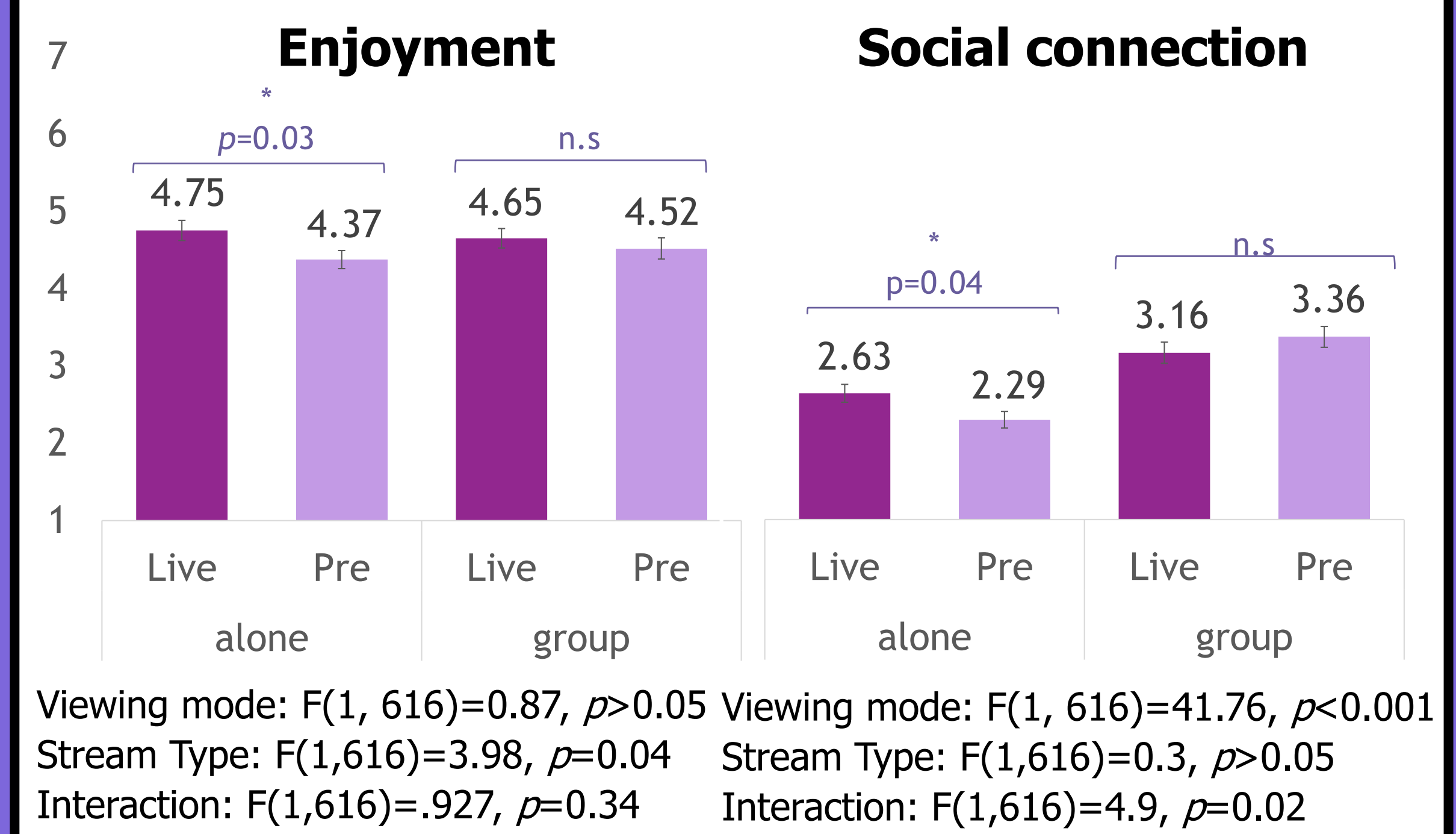
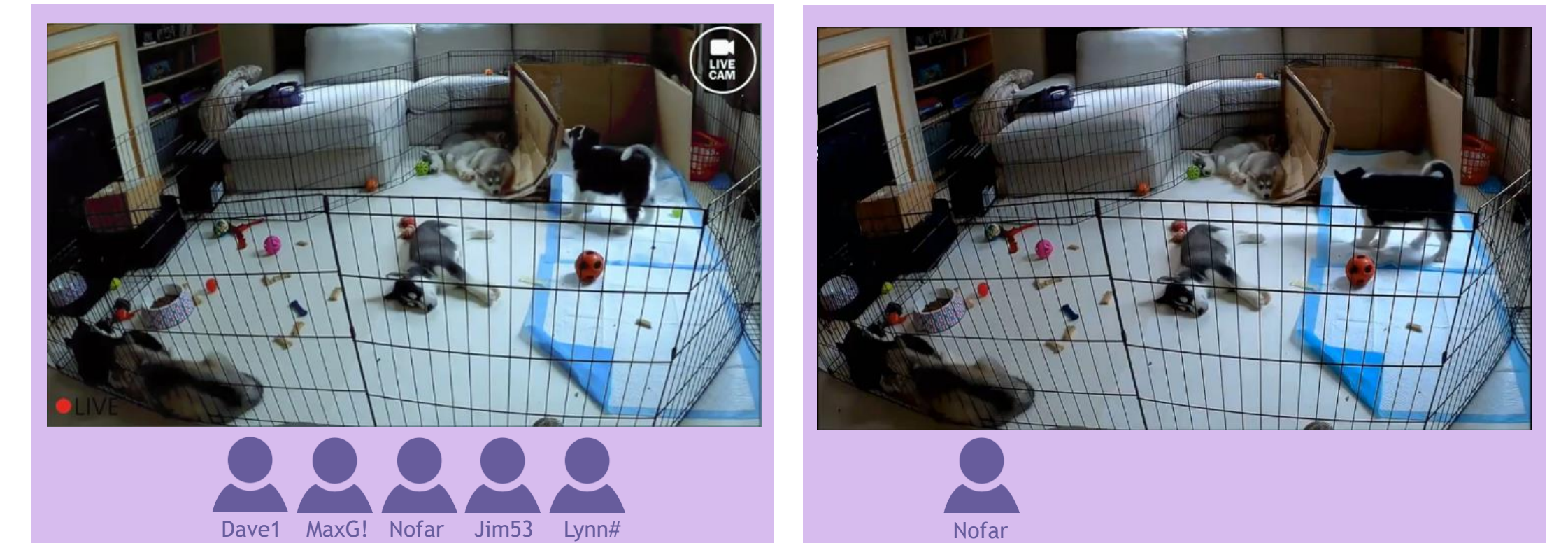


- Participants in the live condition were more likely to choose to watch the same type of video content (as opposed to the outside cartoon option).
- Furthermore, conditional on choosing to watch the same type of content, those in the live condition were more likely to choose to continue watching the same video they were watching before.
- The results extend our findings beyond measured enjoyment to consequential behavioral choices.

## Study 3

If enjoyment of live content is driven by a sense of social connection, then the value of live should be reduced when people already feel connected (i.e., are watching in a group).

- 2 (stream type: live, prerecorded) X 2 (viewing mode: alone, in a group) between-subjects design,  $N = 620$ , mTurk
- Same procedure as Study 2, except that some participants watched the videos alone while others watched in a group with 5 other mTurkers.



- The results again show that, compared to prerecorded content, live content can increase enjoyment and social connection when content is experienced alone.
- However, when live content is consumed in a group, its positive effect on social connection and subsequent enjoyment is diminished.

## Conclusions

- People expect to and do enjoy the exact same content more when they believe it is streaming live compared to when they believe it is prerecorded. This effect is driven by a sense of social connection.
- People choose to continue watching live content more than prerecorded content, and are more interested in attending similar events in real life.
- Future studies will further explore the social connection mechanism.
  - Will people choose to watch content live more when they have a greater need for social connection?
  - Do viewers of live content feel more connected to the broadcaster, to the audience, or to other simultaneous viewers?

## References

1. Vosgerau, J., Wertenbroch, K., & Carmon, Z. (2006). Indeterminacy and live television. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(4), 487-495.
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3. Shteynberg, G., Hirsh, J. B., Apfelbaum, E. P., Larsen, J. T., Galinsky, A. D., & Roese, N. J. (2014). Feeling more together: Group attention intensifies emotion. *Emotion*, 14(6), 1102.

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