

Escaping the Habit Hole:

The Relationship between Habit Strength and Motivation Orientations in Breaking Habits

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LITERATURE

¹ Wood, W., & Neal, D. T. (2007). A new look at habits and the habit-goal interface. *Psychological review*, 114(4), 843–863.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.114.4.843>

INTRODUCTION

Habit strength: stronger habit = higher automaticity = tougher to break ¹

Motivation Orientation: Approach vs. avoidance → which leads to greater habit change?

Aim: To investigate the **relationship between habit strength and motivation orientations** with trying to change the usage of Instagram

HYPOTHESES

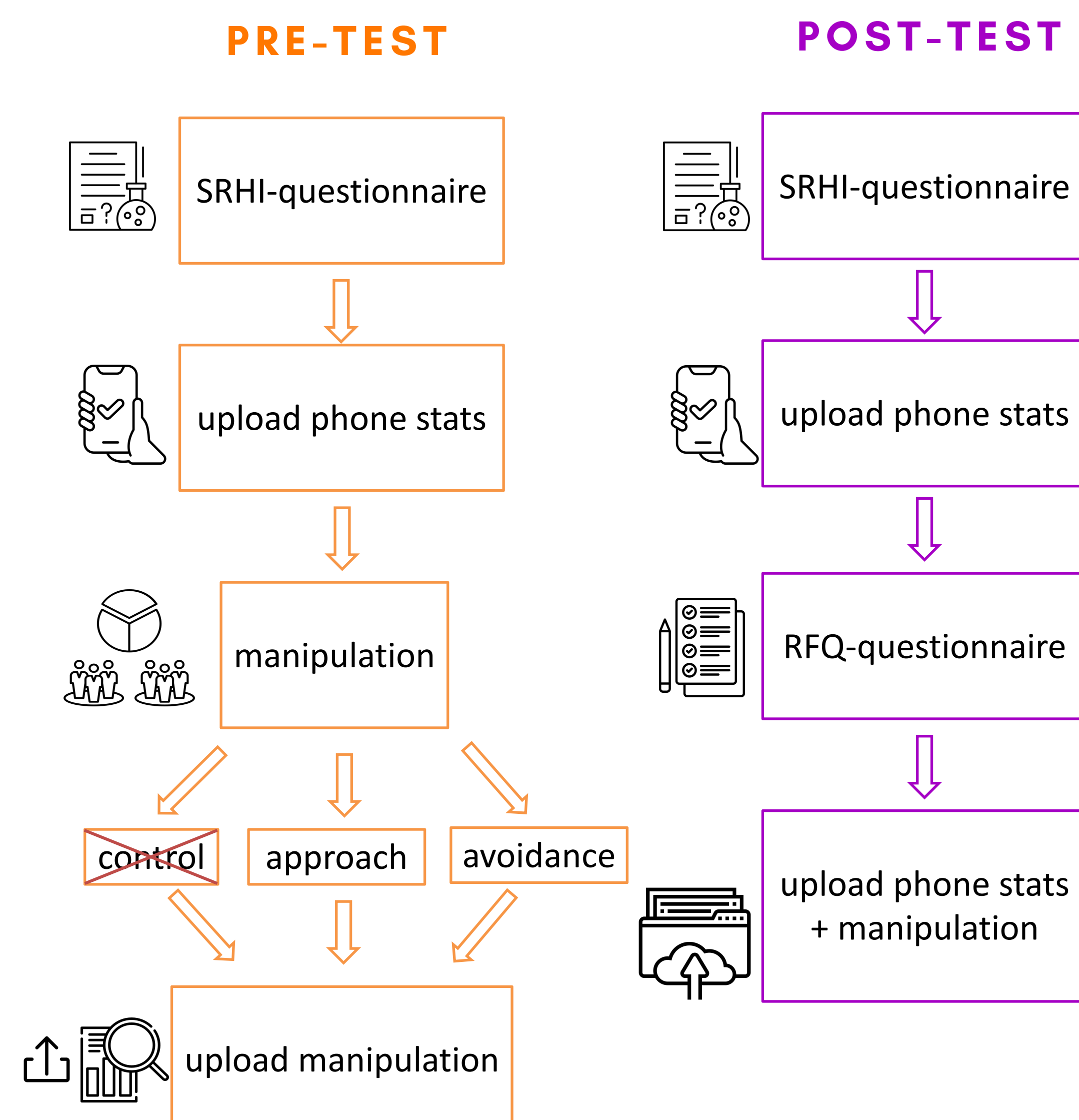
1. Will there be a difference between approach & avoidance-based motivation groups (in both DVs) after intervention?
2. Degree of habit change in strong habits < degree of habit change in weak habits
3. Overall decrease in Instagram use because of participating in our study

METHODS

Design: 2x2x2

IV: motivation orientation, habit strength, time

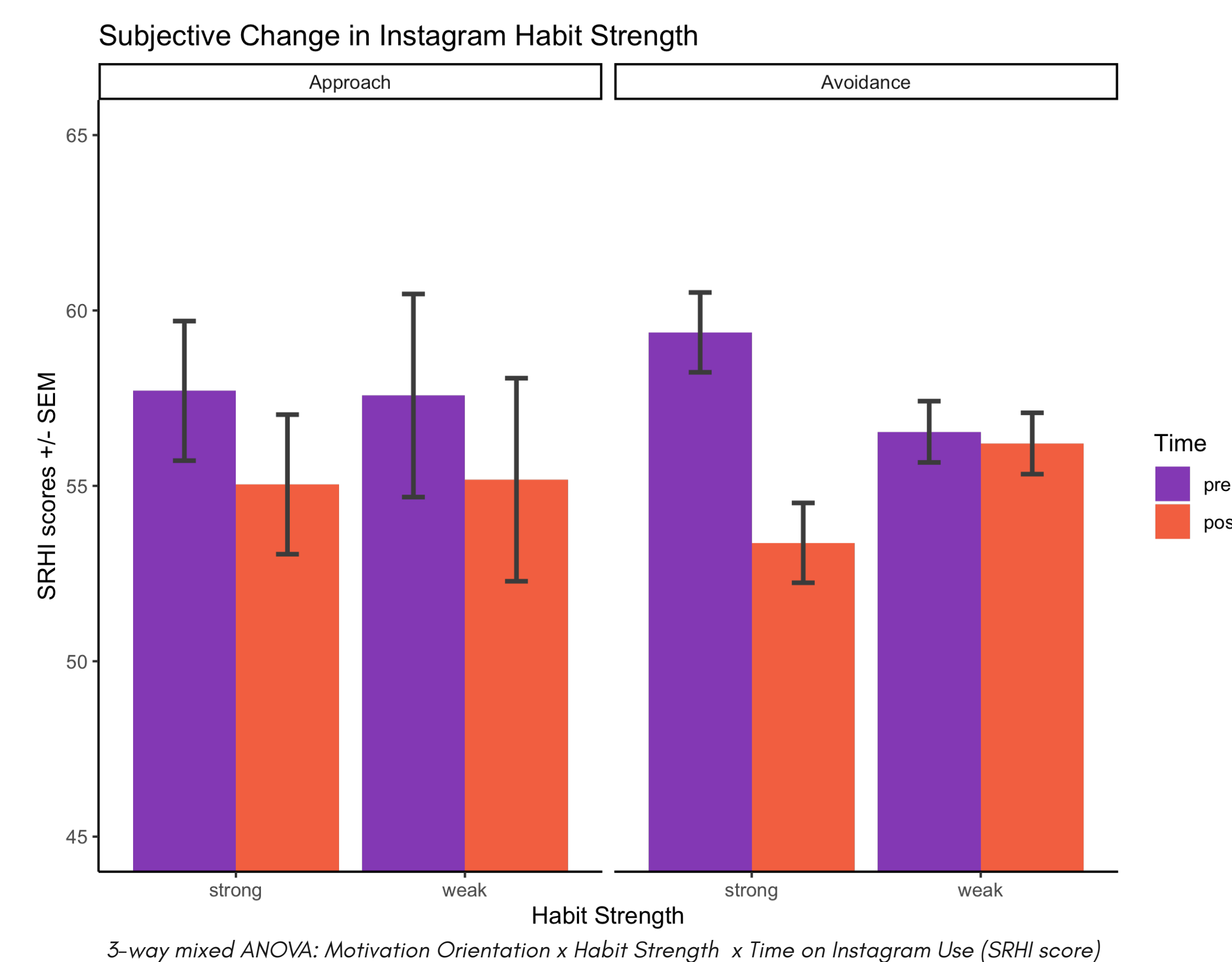
DV: subjective habit strength (SRHI)/objective habit strength (mins used)



RESULTS

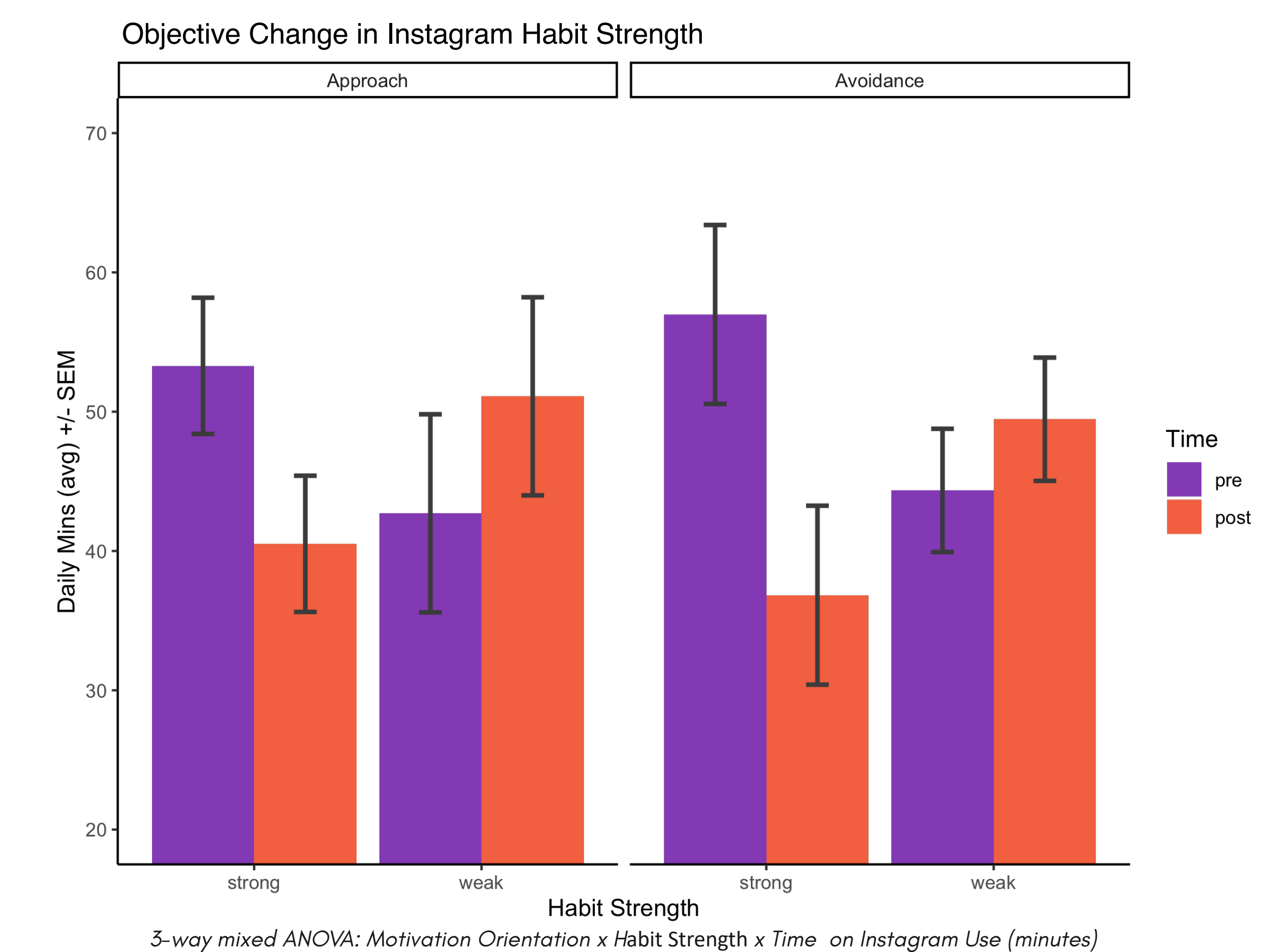
Significant:

- **SRHI:**
 - Effect of time: overall reduction across conditions
- **Minutes:**
 - Effect of habit strength: higher reduction in strong compared to weak habits irrespective of motivation orientation
 - Strength x time interaction: reduction in strong habits at post compared to pre; increase in weak habits at post compared to pre



Speculative:

- **SRHI:**
 - Approach consistently reduced SRHI, irrespective of habit strength
 - Avoidance reduced only strong habits, but larger reduction than approach



DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1:

- no difference between approach and avoidance groups

Hypothesis 2

- contrary: Participants with stronger habits = larger reduction; those with weak habits = increase in usage

Hypothesis 3:

- supported

Interpretations:

- no difference bw approach and avoidance
 - both equally effective?
 - compliance/tracking issues (see limitations)
- overall reduction: subjective and objective habit strength for „strong“ habit group
 - higher motivation to reduce due to study recruitment?
 - overestimation of subjective habit strength
- overall increase in objective habit strength for „weak“group
 - study participation induced effects
 - downloading app for the first time + floor effects
 - possible effects of complacency

LIMITATIONS

Manipulation efficacy:

- non-compliance to instructions
- control group manipulation too similar to experimental manipulation
- no measure to maintain engagement with assigned motivation orientation during 7 days + no manipulation check post
= impossible to test (any) role of motivation orientation
- time frame for breaking habit possibly too short