



# The relationships among the Big Five Personality factors, self-esteem, narcissism, and sensation-seeking to Chinese University students' uses of social networking sites (SNSs)

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## ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that personality factors are related to an individuals' use of social networking sites (SNSs). The present research explores the relationships between the Big Five Personality factors, narcissism, self-esteem, and sensation seeking and individuals' use of *specific features* of SNS. Self-reports were collected from 265 SNS users from a university in China. Regression analyses revealed that personality factors play an important role in how SNS are used. Specifically, extraverts are more likely to use the communicative function of SNS including status update, comment, and adding more friends. Neurotic are more likely to use the feature of status update as a way of self-expression. Agreeable individuals tend to make more comments on others' profiles. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to comment on others' profiles. Users scoring high on openness and sensation seeking are more likely to play online games on SNS. Narcissistic users are more likely to upload their attractive photos on SNS and tend to use update status more frequently for self-presentation. Gender also played an important role in predicting types of SNS use. Males reported more SNS friends and were more likely to play online games than were females, who were more likely to upload self-photos and update their status.

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## 1. Introduction

As one of the most rapidly developed applications of the Internet, social networking sites (SNSs) have become prominent in young peoples' lives. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, LiveJournal, Renren (renren is translated as "people"), and QQpengyou (pengyou is translated as "friend"), are member-based Internet SNS. On these sites, users can post profile information, such as their name, phone number, and photographs, and communicate with others in a variety of ways, such as sending public or private online messages. All social networking sites promote online social interaction, but there are differences in the services they focus on and the populations they are designed to serve. For example, compared to other social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter focuses on the sharing of opinion and information rather than reciprocal social interaction (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2011). As the top two social networking sites in China, Renren is mostly attractive for white collar and university students, while

QQpengyou has a wider range of users (CNNIC, 2012). SNS are believed to potentially play both positive and negative roles in adolescents' and young adults' social, emotional, and cognitive development (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). For example, researchers have found that Facebook plays an important role in the process by which students form and maintain social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Richardson & Hessey, 2009) and may alter the way in which users exchange information that can lead to dates or intimate relationships (Richardson & Hessey, 2009). In addition, Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) found that the frequency with which adolescents used SNS had an indirect effect on their social self-esteem and well-being. Positive feedback on profiles can enhance adolescents' social self-esteem and well-being, whereas negative feedback can decrease both.

There is a small but growing body of evidence suggesting that personality is related to SNS behaviors (Baek, Holton, Harp, & Yaschur, 2011; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). However, limited information is available about the association between personality factors and the use of specific features of SNS. Most previous studies used a simple measure of SNS activity – the overall time spent on the site. Considering the wide range of activities possible of SNS, such as sending messages, status updates, wall

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posts, and games, there is likely to be personality differences in the use of specific features of SNS as well. The present study explored the relationship between personality factors and the use of specific features of SNS. This examination is intended to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between user characteristic and SNS use.

### 1.1. Renren website

Renren website, whose name was changed from Xiaonei (inside University) website in August 2009, is a SNS most popular among Chinese young adults. It is estimated that there are 140 million registered users on Renren, with each user having an average of 187 friends on the site. Similar to Facebook, its initial purpose was to allow university students to create and maintain social ties that were relevant to the university experience. Renren allows users to create a profile where they can post information about themselves, such as their college, company, occupation, phone number, email address, interests, and favorite music. Renren also provides functions such as public and private messaging among users, real-time instant messaging, online games, and video sharing. These functions can satisfy users' desire for socialization, information about current events, entertainment, and so forth. There is a 'Friends' box on Renren which displays the number of friends and a 'status updates' on the profile page where users can post short messages. Users can also upload their photos on their profile page, for friends and others to view. Users have access to all of this information about their friends, at least those who want to provide it. Users are expected to post only truthful information about themselves on their site. Renren friends are typically individuals known in the offline "real" world.

Previous research has suggested that personality may be related to the use and nature of use of the Internet (Amichai-Hamburger, 2002; Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Thayer & Ray, 2006). Most of the research has examined the effects of broad models of personality (i.e., Big Five) on Internet use. Several of the Big Five factors have been found to be related to behaviors on the Internet. The Big Five factors have also been used to investigate SNS use, as discussed next (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Hughes, Bowe, Batey, & Lee, 2011; Ross et al., 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

## 1.2. The Big Five Model and SNS use

### 1.2.1. The Big Five Personality factors

The Big Five model is a broad classification of personality that proposes that personality is composed of five major factors: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Within each of these five broad factors, a range of more specific personality traits are represented. Briefly, extraversion represents traits associated with activity and energy, dominance, sociability, expressiveness, and positive emotions. Agreeableness contrasts a prosocial orientation toward others with an antagonistic orientation. It consists of characteristics such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty. Conscientiousness represents socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior. Neuroticism contrasts emotional stability with a broad range of characteristics, such as negative affect, anxiety, sadness, irritability, and nervous tension. Openness to experience describes the breadth, depth, and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life.

### 1.2.2. Extraversion and SNS use

Extraversion has been shown to correlate with the communicative features of SNS (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). For example, Correa et al. (2010) found that

extraversion was correlated with the use of instant messaging on SNS. In addition, extraverts belong to more 'groups' (Ross et al., 2009) and have significantly more SNS friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010) than the less extraverted. This may be because extraverts utilize these sites as a supplementary way to communicate with friends. However, there also have been studies reporting no relationship or even a negative relationship between extraversion and the communicative features of SNS (Goby, 2006; Hughes et al., 2011). For instance, Goby (2006) found that extraverts were more likely to communicate with others in offline settings than online settings compared to introverts. Considering that recent research findings tend to support the rich-get-richer hypothesis in online communication settings, which holds that socially competent youth are more likely to use online communication to keep in contact with others than youth with high social anxiety (Kraut et al., 2002), it seems reasonable that extraverts would use the communicative features of SNS more than introverts. In the present study, we hypothesized that extraverts have more friends on SNS (**H1**), are more likely to make comments on SNS (**H2**), and tend to use more status updates (**H3**). Our hypotheses are based on research showing that in "real life" extraverts are sociable and talkative (Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Costa & McCrae, 1992), which should lead them to comment more and use status updates more frequently in the "virtual world" (i.e., SNS). Moreover, extraverts tend to make friends offline and then use online communication to keep in touch with these friends (Ross et al., 2009). Therefore, extraverts should have more friends on SNS than introverts.

### 1.2.3. Neuroticism and SNS use

With regard to neuroticism and SNS technology use, early studies found that neuroticism was negatively related to amount of time spent on the Internet (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Tuten & Bosnjak, 2001) and predicted the use of the Internet for seeking information (Tuten & Bosnjak, 2001). However, more recent research has reported that individuals high in neuroticism use the Internet more frequently to reduce loneliness (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003) and are more likely to use it for instant messaging and SNS (Correa et al., 2010; Wolfradt & Doll, 2001). These recent studies suggest that compared with emotional stable users, neurotic users are more likely to use the Internet for social purposes. In addition, according to the evidence that neuroticism is related to loneliness (Correa et al., 2010), individuals high in neuroticism should use the Internet to decrease feelings of loneliness and to create a sense of belongingness. They should seek similar gratifications on SNS. Therefore, we hypothesized that neuroticism is positively related to status updates in SNS as a means of self-presentation aimed at encouraging the responses of others and thereby reducing loneliness (**H4**).

### 1.2.4. Conscientiousness, agreeableness and SNS Use

Little research exists on the relationship among conscientiousness, agreeableness, and SNS use. It has been suggested that conscientious individuals tend to avoid SNS because these sites promote procrastination and serve as a distraction from more important tasks (Butt & Phillips, 2008). Empirical studies have confirmed this hypothesis, finding that conscientiousness is negatively related to time spent on SNS (Ryan & Xenos, 2011) and that conscientious individuals upload significantly fewer pictures to SNS. In the present study, we hypothesized that conscientiousness will be negatively related to SNS use (**H5**).

With respect to the association between agreeableness and SNS use, several studies have found that agreeableness is related neither to overall Internet use nor to any form of social media use (Correa et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2009).

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