



An investigation of Big Five and narrow personality traits in relation to Internet usage

Richard N. Landers, John W. Lounsbury *

Department of Psychology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996 0900, USA

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Abstract

The relationship between Internet usage and the Big Five as well as three narrow personality traits was examined using 117 undergraduates as study participants. Results indicated that total Internet usage was negatively related to three of the Big Five traits – Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion as well as two narrow traits – Optimism and Work Drive, and positively related to Tough-Mindedness. The results of a hierarchical regression analysis indicated that Work Drive added significantly to Extraversion and Conscientious in the prediction of total Internet usage, producing a multiple correlation of 0.349 ($p < 0.01$). Results were discussed individually by trait, in terms of broad versus narrow personality traits, and regarding suggestions for future research.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has emerged a limited, but growing, research literature on personality traits in relation to Internet usage (e.g., [Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000](#);

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-865-577-6089; fax: +1-865-974-3330.
E-mail address: jlounsbury@aol.com (J.W. Lounsbury).

Leung, 2002; Scealy, Phillips, & Stevenson, 2002). There are several important reasons why this area of research merits attention. Personality traits represent relatively enduring characteristics of individuals that show consistencies over their lifespans and across a wide range of situations (Pervin & John, 1997; Shaffer, 2000). Moreover, personality traits have been found to be related to a broad spectrum of human activities and types of behavior, including school attendance (McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001), gambling behavior (Blaszczynski, Walker, Sagris, & Dickerson, 1999), parent–infant bed sharing (Kelmanson, 1999), confessing to crimes in police interrogations (Watanabe & Yokota, 1999), blood donations (Paunonen & Nicol, 2001), housing behavior (Sweaney, Pittman, & Montgomery, 1984), music listening preferences (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), leadership behavior (Judge & Bono, 2000), behavioral aggression (Wu & Clark, 2003), television-viewing (Persegani et al., 2002), drug use (Sussman, McCuller, & Dent, 2003), sexual behavior (Kalichman, Chain, Zweben, & Swain, 2003), job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and participation in sports (Freixanet, 1999; O’Sullivan, Zuckerman, & Kraft, 1998). As usage of the Internet is regularly engaged in by many individuals in all walks of life, (NTIA Release, 2000), it is a logical area to investigate from a personality perspective, particularly since level of usage is often discretionary rather than mandated, and thus more likely to reflect personal motives, needs, values, preferences and other personality attributes.

In addition, from the perspective of individual development, personality precedes many of the other variables that can and have been studied in relation to the Internet, including attitudes toward the Internet (Lavin, Marvin, McLarney, Nola, & Scott, 1999), computer expertise (Blair, O’Neil, & Price, 1999), computer training (Rozell & Gardner, 1999), time management (Brenner, 1997), social support (Shaw & Gant, 2002), lifestyle characteristics (Ho & Lee, 2001), advertising beliefs (Korgaonkar, Silverblatt, & O’Leary, 2001), tutoring systems (Wheeler & Regian, 1999), information support (Scull, 1999), collaborative knowledge (Chung, O’Neil, & Herl, 1999), innovation adoption factors (Shelley, 1998), and computer anxiety (Chua, Chen, & Wong, 1999) and other computer-related affective states (Coffin & MacIntyre, 1999). From the standpoint of creating a meaningful knowledge base in this area, it is important to establish first whether personality traits account for variation in Internet usage, and which traits are relatively more important. It will then be important to assess which variables explain additional variance in Internet usage above and beyond that accounted for by personality traits.

The present study addresses the relationship between personality traits and Internet usage. It is important to consider first the issue of what personality traits to investigate in relation to Internet usage, since there are so many different traits to choose from in the broader psychological literature. Fortunately, there is a general consensus regarding the Big Five model as a unified, parsimonious conceptual framework for personality (Digman, 1990, 1997; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). Empirical studies have verified the overall factor structure and integrity of the Big Five constructs of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism in many different settings and areas of inquiry (Costa & McCrae, 1994;

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