



Self-presentation and belonging on Facebook: How personality influences social media use and motivations

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between the Big Five and the use of Facebook to fulfill belonging and self-presentational needs. One hundred and eighty four undergraduates completed a survey assessing personality and Facebook behaviors and motivations. High agreeableness and neuroticism were the best predictors of belongingness-related behaviors and motivations. Extraversion was associated with more frequent use of Facebook to communicate with others. Self-presentational behaviors and motivations were best predicted by low conscientiousness and high neuroticism. Results suggest that conscientious individuals are cautious in their online self-presentation. Neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion were positively associated with the tendency to express one's actual self. Neuroticism was positively associated with the expression of ideal and hidden self-aspects. The motivation to express these self-aspects mediated the relationship between neuroticism and self-disclosure.

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1. Introduction

The Internet has had a major impact on social life (see Bargh & McKenna, 2004 for review). In 2010, 61% of American adults used social networking websites (SNS) (Zickuhr, 2010). Facebook is the most popular SNS (Jain, 2010) with over one billion users (Facebook, 2012).

Recently, social scientists have begun studying Facebook, examining demographic characteristics of users; motivations for use, self-presentation, and social interactions (see Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012 for review). Some studies have examined how personality relates to Facebook use (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Ross et al., 2009). According to Nadkarni and Hofmann's (2012) dual-factor model, Facebook use is motivated by two needs: belonging and self-presentation. The current research integrates these approaches, using the dual-factor model to examine how personality influences motivations to use Facebook to fulfill these two needs.

2. Belongingness and self-presentation as motivations for Facebook use

The need to belong is the fundamental drive to form and maintain relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and a major motivator of Facebook use. Facebook allows users to fulfill belonging needs through communicating with and learning about others. Facebook can be an effective method for coping with feelings of so-

cial disconnection (Sheldon, Abad, & Hirsch, 2011), as it enables peer acceptance and relationship development (Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010) and boosts self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008).

The second major motivation for Facebook use is self-presentation. Facebook activities that accomplish self-presentational goals include posting photographs, profile information, and wall content (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Research has shown that popularity-seeking users tend to disclose information on Facebook (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Utz, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012), engage in strategic self-presentation, and enhance their profiles (Utz et al., 2012). Nonetheless, profiles generally represent accurate self-presentation (Back et al., 2010).

The Internet can provide a unique venue for expressing alternate selves. According to McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002), some individuals, particularly those high in social anxiety, feel able to express hidden self-aspects (characteristics currently part of the self, but not normally expressed in everyday life) on the Internet. Possible and ideal selves may also be presented online, as demonstrated by a content analysis of SNS profiles (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). This expression of alternate selves may seem to contradict findings that online profiles are accurate. However, elements of both actual and possible selves can be presented via online profiles, and personality may affect the extent to which these selves are presented.

3. Personality, belonging, self-presentation and Facebook use

The consensus among many researchers is that personality can be best explained by the Five Factor Model ("Big Five") (Funder,

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2000; McCrae & Costa, 1997). The five factor structure has been replicated cross-culturally, suggesting that it is universal (John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1997). The Big Five traits are openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism. Extraversion is characterized by sociability, energy, and talkativeness. Agreeableness involves warmth, cooperativeness, and helpfulness. Openness consists of creativity, intellectualism, and preference for novelty. Conscientiousness is reflected in discipline, responsibility, and orderliness. Neuroticism is characterized by anxiety, moodiness, and emotional instability.

I will discuss how the Big Five relate to the use of Facebook to fulfill belonging and self-presentation needs, including expression of different self-aspects. Two types of *belongingness-related behaviors*: *information-seeking* (using Facebook to learn about others) and *communication* (using Facebook to communicate with others), and two types of *belongingness motives*: *acceptance-seeking* and *connection/caring* (connecting with or supporting others) will be examined. Two types of *self-presentational behaviors* will be examined: *general self-disclosure* (posting information about oneself) and *emotional disclosure*. *Self-presentational motivations* will also be examined: *attention-seeking* and presentation of *actual*, *hidden*, and *ideal* self-aspects.

3.1. Extraversion

Extraversion is related to several belongingness-related constructs. Extraverts have more friends, higher quality friendships (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998) and more satisfying romantic relationships than introverts (White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Thus, it is unsurprising that extraversion is associated with greater Facebook use (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011; Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010) and more friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Research shows that extraverts use Facebook to communicate with others by contacting friends (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010) and commenting on friends' pages (Gosling et al., 2011). Surprisingly, introverted individuals are more likely to report using Facebook to keep up with friends (Moore & McElroy, 2012); however Gosling et al. (2011) found that extraversion was positively associated with viewing others' Facebook pages. Thus, it is unclear how extraversion is related to the use of Facebook to learn about others, but the current study will test this relationship.

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion will be positively associated with *communication*.

Extraversion is related to strategic self-presentation. Extraversion is associated with public self-consciousness (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999) and self-monitoring (John, Cheek, & Klohnen, 1996). Findings on the relationship between Facebook self-disclosure and extraversion have been mixed. Bibby (2008) found that extraversion was associated with greater self-disclosure on Facebook, while Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) found that extraverts reveal less personal information in their profiles. This may be explained by findings showing that although extraverts are more likely to replace their profile photograph and post photographs containing others, they are not more likely to post photographs of themselves alone, update their profile text, (Gosling et al., 2011) or post on their walls (Moore & McElroy, 2012). These contradictory findings suggest that focusing on motivations rather than specific activities may be useful in understanding extraverts' self-presentation. Extraverts are likely to use the same strategic self-presentational strategies online as they do offline and should strive to present the same traits they present in person (regardless of the specific Facebook features used to accomplish this), but they should be no more likely to self disclose

through Facebook than introverts. Introverts tend to feel more able to express hidden self-aspects online (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002) as do individuals high in social anxiety (McKenna et al., 2002), a trait positively correlated with introversion (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), suggesting that extraversion is negatively related to displaying hidden qualities on Facebook.

Hypothesis 2: Extraversion will be positively associated with expression of *actual self*-aspects and negatively associated with expression of *hidden self*-aspects.

3.2. Agreeableness

Agreeable individuals have successful friendships (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998) and romances (White et al., 2004). Because of their orientation toward others, belongingness motivations should be important to agreeable individuals and they may choose Facebook as one way to fulfill those needs. However, despite predicting an association between agreeableness and Facebook communication, neither Moore and McElroy (2012), nor Ross et al. (2009) found evidence for this relationship, but it will be tested in the current study. In addition to focusing on these behaviors, as past research has, the current study will also examine motivations.

Hypothesis 3: Agreeableness will be positively associated with *information-seeking*, *acceptance-seeking* and *connection/caring*.

Agreeable individuals present a more consistent and authentic version of themselves (Leary & Allen, 2011), and have greater perceived control over their online self-presentation (Sun & Wu, 2011). Thus, they may use Facebook to present actual self traits and refrain from attention-seeking. Agreeableness has not been associated with specific SNS self-presentational behaviors, other than Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky's (2010) finding that agreeable females posted more photographs. Therefore, the current study's focus on self-presentation motives may provide a useful understanding of the relationship between agreeableness and Facebook use.

Hypothesis 4: Agreeableness will be positively associated with expression of *actual self*-aspects and negatively associated with *attention-seeking*.

3.3. Openness

Openness is correlated with greater social media use (Correa et al., 2010). Research examining Facebook as a means of maintaining connections has found that open individuals report posting more on others' walls (Ross et al., 2009; see Moore & McElroy, 2012 for exception) and supplementing real-life interactions by using Facebook to learn about others and plan activities (Carpenter, Green, & LaFlam, 2011).

Hypothesis 5: Openness will be positively associated with *communication* and *information-seeking*.

In their online self-presentation, open individuals are more self-disclosing. They are more likely to blog (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008) and reveal personal information in their Facebook profiles (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010).

Hypothesis 6: Openness will be positively associated with *general self-disclosure* and *emotional disclosure*.

3.4. Neuroticism

Neuroticism is associated with several outcomes relating to belongingness needs. Neurotic individuals are less satisfied with

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