



The influence of personality on Facebook usage, wall postings, and regret

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ABSTRACT

The Five Factor Model of personality has been used extensively in the management and psychology fields to predict attitudes and behaviors. Only recently have researchers begun to examine the role of psychological factors in influencing an individual's use of technology platforms, such as Facebook. This study uses both a survey of Facebook users and actual Facebook data to uncover why some individuals are more involved in Facebook than others. 219 undergraduate students participated in a survey that assessed their personality and their reported usage of Facebook. Of these, 143 voluntarily befriended the investigator, which gave her access to their actual Facebook sites and objective data on their number of friends, photos, and wall postings. Results showed personality to explain significant amounts of variance over and above gender and Facebook experience in terms of actual number of Facebook friends, the nature of their wall postings and on their level of regret for inappropriate Facebook content.

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1. Introduction

The Internet has opened many new avenues through which people can communicate and socialize, with social networking sites (SNSs) playing an important part. By the second quarter of 2008, Forrester Research estimated 75% of Internet users were involved in some sort of 'social media' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Specifically, Facebook users account for about 37.5% of the entire US population (Saleem, 2010) and Facebook accounts for an astonishing 17.9% of all time spent online (Srinivasan, 2009a). This growing new trend has prompted researchers to become interested in what types of people rely on online social media tools in their interactions with others (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010).

Most research regarding Facebook relates to identity presentation and privacy concerns (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Ross et al., 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the role of personality in Facebook usage. In doing so, we look at how personality affects the digital footprint people leave on this popular social network, not only in terms of time spent on Facebook, but also in terms of its use and content. We hope to address the issue of how personality influences the degree to which individuals use this form of social networking and the content they include.

Our study has two noteworthy contributions. First, previous studies have examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and Facebook usage, however much of this has been limited to surveys of Facebook users, their motives for turning to

social networks (Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Ross et al., 2009), and their attitudes toward social networking (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Many of these studies and others (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000) offer insights into what kind of information people include on Facebook, their attitudes toward using Facebook, the frequency of their use of the various features of this medium, as well as on gender differences (Correa et al., 2010; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000). However, this research relies almost exclusively on self-reported, rather than actual usage. A notable exception is the work of Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010), who encoded individuals' actual Facebook page content. Looking at Facebook user pages, they rated the amounts of basic, personal, educational, and work-related information about Facebook users. They then examined how the amounts of each type of information were affected by the personality of respective users. Our study extends this body of research by going beyond the association between personality and self-reported Facebook usage and features (e.g., number of friends and photos) to an examination of actual Facebook content. Specifically, we extend the work of Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) on actual Facebook content to include wall posting activity. That is, we consider how personality traits influence the extent to which Facebook users post primarily about themselves or about others.

Second, questions have arisen about the appropriateness of content being posted on Facebook and other social networking sites and the fact that other parties (e.g., universities and employers) may gain access to Facebook information and use it in making decisions that adversely affect the Facebook account holder (Brady, 2006). Previous research has looked at user perceptions of the appropriateness of information posted on Facebook. For example,

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Peluchette and Karl (2008) found that 20% of Facebook users reported posting information that they would not want their employers to see, with males being more likely than females to post questionable comments or pictures on Facebook. Disclosing too much of an individual's personal life is very easy to do on a medium like Facebook, and can very quickly lead to regret, which in its most extreme form can lead to "Facebook suicide" or the closing of a user account (Justice, 2007). While some research exists on the possible causes of why people make postings on Facebook they later regret (Wang et al., 2011), no research exists, however, documenting the degree to which individuals vary in their sense of concern or regret over such Facebook activity. To begin to fill this gap in the literature, we look at the effects of personality on Facebook users' sense of regret regarding their use of Facebook.

2. Personality and Facebook

Personality psychologists have reached a consensus that the domain of personality can best be described by the Big Five dimensions of the Five Factor Model (FFM) (Devaraj, Easley, & Crant, 2008). Barrick, Mount, and Judge (2001) described FFM as the most useful taxonomy in personality research, while Costa and McCrae (1992) consider it the most comprehensive and parsimonious model of personality. The FFM has received considerable empirical support and is now considered the standard personality trait measure (Wehrli, 2008). The five personality factors; extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to new experiences; relate to people's behavior in a wide variety of contexts (Wehrli, 2008). Personality was chosen over other individual differences such as cognitive style (e.g., Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator) due to recent evidence suggesting the Big Five personality factors predict Internet use better than cognitive style (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Devaraj et al., 2008; McElroy, Hendrickson, Townsend, & DeMarie, 2007). Moreover, Amichai-Hamburger (2002) has made the case that personality is a major predictor of internet behavior, while others have linked personality to on-line activities such as blogging (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008) and contributing to Wikipedia (Amichai-Hamburger, Kaplan, & Dorpatcheon, 2008).

Previous researchers have looked at the role of personality traits as they relate to the Internet, in general (Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Devaraj et al., 2008; Engelberg & Sjöberg, 2004; McElroy et al., 2007; Swickert, Hittner, Harris, & Herring, 2002) and to social media, such as Facebook, in particular (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Ross et al., 2009; Wehrli, 2008). With respect to the Internet, Amiel and Sargent (2004) explored the relationship between personality and internet usage motives. They found those scoring high in neuroticism (low emotional stability) reported using the Internet to feel a sense of "belonging" and to be informed, while extraverts made more instrumental and goal-oriented use of Internet services (Amiel & Sargent, 2004). McElroy et al. (2007) found personality to be a much better predictor of internet use than cognitive style, while Devaraj and associates' (2008) results showed a moderating role for personality on the relationship between technology usefulness and intention to use and between subjective norms and intention to use (with the exception of openness).

The research involving Facebook has found some dimensions of personality to be better predictors of Facebook usage than others. Moreover, personality has been shown to influence some aspects of Facebook usage but not others, as noted below.

2.1. Extraversion and Facebook

Extraversion refers to the extent to which individuals are social, cheerful, optimistic, active and talkative. Individuals high in

extraversion are expected to engage in high amounts of social interaction and approach others more easily (Wehrli, 2008). It is the least debatable personality trait as it relates to Facebook usage because it has consistently shown strong, although sometimes contradictory, effects in prior studies. Research has offered two competing explanations for the relationship between extraversion and Facebook usage: social compensation and the "rich-get-richer" (Ong et al., 2010). According to the social compensation explanation, introverts would have the most to gain from the use of social networks like Facebook because such indirect communication allows them to compensate for their lack of interpersonal skills, while the "rich-get-richer" proposition argues that extraverts benefit more since Facebook simply provides another platform for them to communicate with friends and contacts made off-line. While some research has demonstrated that extraverts spend less time in chat rooms (McElroy et al., 2007), presumably because they prefer face-to-face communication, most research lends support to the "rich-get-richer" argument. However, the extent of the role of extraversion is dependent on the nature of Facebook usage.

Wehrli (2008) and Correa et al. (2010), for example, found extraversion to be positively related to the use of social networks. Extraverts spend more time on social network sites (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010) and they report having a larger Facebook imprint in terms of belonging to more Facebook groups (Ross et al., 2009) and more Facebook friends (Ong et al., 2010) than less extraverted users. However, when examining actual Facebook activity, Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) found just the opposite; that extraversion was not related to the number of Facebook groups to which one belonged but that it was positively related to the actual number of Facebook friends one had. More importantly, extraversion does seem to be related to the nature of Facebook usage and content. Correa et al. (2010) found that extraverts reported making more contact with their Facebook friends, were more likely to broadcast their activities and events on Facebook, and posted more pictures on Facebook. Moreover, Bibby (2008) found that extraverts engaged in more self-disclosure through self-generated Facebook content. On the other hand, Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) reported extraverts engaging in less divulgence of personal information on their Facebook profiles. These findings suggest that extraversion is more closely related to personal disclosure of one's current activities and thoughts as opposed to established interests, favorites (e.g., songs, movies, etc.), and relationship status, all of which are more likely already known to friends of extraverts. This speculation is consistent with the view of Amiel and Sargent (2004), who argued that extraverts would see social networks as places to share information and opinions rather than as a substitute for real interaction. Finally, because extraverts use social networks for self-disclosure, they are less likely to regret doing so than are introverts. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. Extraversion will be related to Facebook usage such that more extroverted users will report spending more time on Facebook, use it more frequently, have more Facebook friends, more frequently post information on their walls, post more photos, and engage in more self-generated wall postings, and report less regret over what they post. Because other-generated wall postings do not involve self-disclosure, we propose no relationship between extraversion and wall postings about others.

2.2. Agreeableness and Facebook

Agreeable persons represent the tendency to be sympathetic, courteous, flexible, kind, trusting and forgiving. Individuals high in agreeableness have been known to avoid conflict, but are

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