



Self-monitoring, honesty, and cue use on Facebook: The relationship with user extraversion and conscientiousness[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the relationship between Facebook (FB) users' self-monitoring and self-reported FB honesty and the content of users' profiles. It was anticipated that high self-monitors would construct a more extraverted profile and honest FB users would construct a more conscientious profile. A content analysis of 53 cues on participants' FB profiles ($N = 100$) was conducted. Supporting evidence was shown in a lens model analysis of FB user profiles and strangers' ($N = 35$) impressions of users' personality. User self-monitoring was uniquely associated with three FB cues: posting a profile picture at a younger age, posting more frequently, and using more shorthand in status updates. These three cues informed strangers' estimations of user extraversion, but were unrelated to estimations of users' conscientiousness. Honesty on FB was uniquely associated with three cues that informed strangers' estimations of user conscientiousness: expressing positive affect and talking more about family in status updates, and having FB friends who expressed support in response to status updates. This study demonstrated that FB use and profile page construction were associated with FB users' personality, and the construction of profiles affected strangers' perceptions of FB users.

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1. Introduction

Facebook (FB) has become a ubiquitous and consequential component of millions of people's lives. When joining the FB community, the platform requires users to compose an online self, which is viewed by users' self-selected and mediated audience. This composition is inherently an act of self-presentation, which is "the goal directed activity of controlling information of self in order to influence the impressions formed by audiences" (Schlenker, 2004, p. 492). Although face-to-face (FtF) self-presentations are also directed toward the goal of creating and maintaining a stable and favorable impression, in social networking sites (SNSs), self-construction is particularly strategic and deliberate (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Livingstone, 2008). The self-presentational affordances of online environments create dialectical tensions between an accurate and an ideal self (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006) and between a truthful and a deceptive self (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). In response to these tensions, users maintain a fairly accurate presentation of self on personal web pages (Marcus, Machilek, & Schütz, 2006) and on online dating profiles (Toma et al., 2008). In fact, strangers can accurately estimate user personality by examining only a FB profile (Hall & Pennington, 2012) or a personal web

page (Marcus et al., 2006). Although some self-aggrandizement, misrepresentation, and outright deception occurs on mediated platforms, on the whole, users present themselves online in a manner that approximates their offline self (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007; Toma et al., 2008).

Past research has explored the degree or type of online deception (e.g., Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010; Toma et al., 2008), but the link between user personality and self-presentational acts in online environments is nascent. Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) shows promise in explaining variance in online misrepresentation. A recent article on deception in online dating profiles (i.e., Hall et al., 2010) suggested that self-monitoring was the strongest and most consistent predictor of strategic misrepresentation – far more predictive than users' gender, age, and education. However, one limitation of Hall et al. was there was no way to determine if or how deception affected strangers' perceptions. The present study directly addresses this shortcoming by examining strangers' perceptions of FB users' profiles.

Research on FtF self-presentation has long acknowledged that there are various strategies for presenting a favorable self (Jones & Pittman, 1982) and that self-monitors privilege self-presentations that are more social and extraverted (Fuglestad & Snyder, 2009). The present investigation will argue that although a high self-monitor is more likely to admit to being deceptive on their FB profile page, high-self monitors will seek a balance between the need to self-promote and the need to be reasonably honest. To find this balance, a high self-monitor will reveal and promote aspects

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of self that are both accurate and valued on FB. Because extraversion is strongly associated with self-monitoring (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000), we will argue that high self-monitors will promote an extraverted self on FB. By way of comparison, an honest FB user will also attempt to promote personality traits that are associated with honesty, specifically conscientiousness (Dunn & Guadagno, 2012). The present study will demonstrate that the high self-monitor promotes extraverted aspects of their personality on FB, while an honest FB user promotes a conscientious self-presentation. Additionally, we will offer evidence that the use of cues associated with extraversion and honesty influence the impressions of strangers. The primary contributions of the present study are threefold: the present study extends prior work on self-monitoring on FB (e.g., Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011) by demonstrating that self-monitoring is uniquely associated with the use of certain cues on FB; the present study demonstrates that the self-presentational acts associated with both self-monitoring and honesty on FB have measurable consequences on the impressions formed by strangers; and that the impressions formed are consistent with the self-presentational goals associated with both self-monitoring and honesty. This is the first study to link self-monitoring and FB honesty with both profile content and strangers' impressions of targets.

To offer supporting evidence, the present study employs the Brunswik (1956) lens model, which has gained renewed prominence in person perception research due to its ability to account for the behaviors diagnostic of actors' personality and the cues used by others to form impressions of the actor (Gifford, 2006; Hall & Pennington, 2012). To show evidence that self-monitoring and honesty are related to the use of certain FB cues, discrete FB cues will be linked with user personality. To show evidence that these cues influence the impressions of strangers, this manuscript will show the relationship between these cues and strangers' estimations of user extraversion and conscientiousness.

1.1. Dispositional strategy

Lens model researchers (e.g., Gifford, 2006) adopt a dispositional strategy of personality, which maintains that individuals' enduring traits are manifested in a set of predictable and consistent social behaviors. Individuals' social behaviors are then used by others to judge and interpret personality. That is, individuals look for valid behavioral evidence of trait dispositions from which to form impressions of one another. In investigating how individuals' dispositions are also manifested in their personal environments (e.g., bedrooms and offices), Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, and Morris (2002) developed this perspective. Gosling et al. (2002) argue that people actively create their social environments to match and reinforce their dispositions and attitudes. Consequently, individuals' "personal environments may contain an abundance of potentially informative cues about an individual and therefore provide rich information to observers" (Gosling et al., 2002, p. 383–384). In bedrooms and offices, people leave behind behavioral residue of their personality, which then provides clues about their dispositions. For example, alphabetized books on a shelf provide evidence that a person is organized and tickets to the opera are indicative of their openness to experience. Applications of the lens model to online impression formation by Gosling and colleagues (Gosling et al., 2007; Vazire & Gosling, 2004) have suggested that online behavioral residue accurately reflects user personality and can be used to accurately judge user personality.

On a FB profile, FB users attempt to convey an image of self that is both consistent with their underlying personality and strategically managed to promote positive or desirable aspects of self (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008). FB users modify their profiles according to whatever aspect of self that is

most appealing to their perceived audience (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). For example, because popularity is seen as attractive, users accept and request friend requests online that they would not accept offline (boyd, 2010). However, the relationship between users' underlying dispositions and self-presentational acts on FB is a nascent topic of research. Self-monitoring is a trait that may help to explain how FB user disposition, self-presentational acts, and self-presentations goals may coincide.

1.2. Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is the regulation of self-expressions for the sake of the demands and norms of an audience or context (Snyder, 1987). The high self-monitor is characterized as a person who behaves strategically to obtain desired outcomes by regulating public presentations. In comparison, low self-monitors present themselves in ways that reflect their authentic attitudes, values, and beliefs. Particularly relevant to the present investigation, the high self-monitor shows a great deal of consistency in chronic self-presentation. Specifically, high self-monitors appear friendly and outgoing regardless of context or audience, which is a consistent reflection of their underlying extraversion (Fuglestad & Snyder, 2009). As a consequence, we predict:

H1. Self-monitoring will positively correlate with presentations of extraversion on FB.

Self-monitoring has also been empirically linked to deception (e.g., McLeod & Genereux, 2008). Because self-monitors actively and strategically seek social prominence and likability, deception may help them achieve those goals. McLeod and Genereux (2008) suggest that self-monitoring is strongly related to both the acceptability and likelihood of lying for the purpose of self-gain. In online dating environments, there is much to gain by presenting attributes particularly valued by potential partners, including physical attributes, education and wealth, and fitness (Toma et al., 2008). Hall et al. (2010) found that self-monitoring was associated with misrepresenting all of those characteristics. Users of online dating sites who are high in self-monitoring are sensitive to the desires of others, and thus, they are more likely to take advantage of the malleable aspects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to modify their self-presentation and attract a partner. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2. Self-monitoring will be negatively associated with an honest portrayal of self on FB.

Given the above hypotheses, the question becomes, in what ways will high self-monitors represent themselves? One way to approach this question is to consider the goals and qualities of the self-monitor in relation to what is considered desirable on FB. The high self-monitor is particularly motivated to present a self that cultivates status and demonstrates social cachet (Fuglestad & Snyder, 2009). When using FB, high-self monitors are particularly concerned with interaction-oriented goals, which focus on gaining and maintaining attention from others (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). When given the opportunity to engage in a range of self-presentational strategies, high self-monitors will pick strategies that elevate their status, enhance their social connectedness, and emphasize their likable and engaging qualities. However, online self-presentations strike a balance between the honest and the ideal (Ellison et al., 2006). Given that many of the FB friends a user has are also offline friends (Ellison et al., 2007), blatant deception on FB can have dire social consequences for a user (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011). As a result, individuals typically manage their online profiles within the parameters of their offline characteristics and personality (Vazire & Gosling, 2004).

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