

Literature article review

Psychology



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Article Review: Facebook Profiles and Personality Here Here Here Here

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Introduction

A 2010 article by Back and colleagues examines the validity of the personalities projected through personal Facebook profiles. The authors introduce this topic by referring to the large number of people that currently use Facebook (and other online social networks like MySpace). The consequences of this mass participation include the integration of Facebook in everyday social activities, as well as changes to the landscape of communications. A common assumption, by the public and scientific community alike, is that profiles on such sites are engineered (be it consciously or not) to present an idealized representation of the users personality (Maranto & Martin, 2010). However, a contending theory is that social networks act as an extension of the background for communication, but the information remains as accurate as in any other process. This study was designed to test the competing hypotheses by evaluating the accuracy of personalities that may be interpreted from Facebook profiles.

Methods

This experiment employed a survey designed from various questionnaires designed to measure the Big Five personality dimensions (openness, conscientiousness, version, agreeableness, and neuroticism). To account for social differences, the study was conducted using groups in both the United States (Texas), and Europe (Germany). Participants from both locations were between the ages of 17 and 22, but recruitment procedures differed sharply. American researchers attracted 133 subjects from a University campus by using candy as an incentive, while 103 German participants were recruited

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through advertisements for a personality assessment.

Results

The results and discussion of this study were presented together, but can be teased apart for the purpose of review. Correlations were calculated for the relationship between self-reported subject data, and information obtained from observer evaluations. Self-reports were highly correlated with those of observers in virtually all tested combinations. The strongest relationships were found in the extraversion measure, while neuroticism was weakest.

Discussion

While disseminating the results, the authors (very) briefly share their interpretation of these findings. Primarily, the results support the accuracy of the personalities observed through Facebook profiles, in comparison to the actual personalities of users. The differences among the Big Five traits are explained as being consistent with existing research that suggests version is the easiest personality characteristic to infer (Curiosity & Judge. 2011).

Unfortunately, the authors fail to discuss the many limitations of their research design.

The selection process presents a challenge to the validity of the study, as the groups are far from comparable in any aspect but age (which actually limits the applicability of the results to any other age group), and each group contains consistent characteristics (students, people seeking assessment) that could easily account for any significant differences that may be observed. An additional concern is that the survey delivery method differed between groups, being in a laboratory in Texas but online in Germany. Also, the sample was predominantly female (167 of 236 subjects), again restraining the application of findings. Accordingly, the subject matter of this

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study should be further examined using a stronger design.

References

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