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Narcissism and Extraversion Predict Group Specific Information Sharing on Social Networking Websites

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Introduction

Past research indicates that social networking sites (SNS) provide important means to communicate with different audiences and share important life events. The extent to which people share information may depend on both the events in question and the personality of the SNS users. For example, individuals share positive and negative life events on SNS depending upon their well-being, stress and quality of life (Bevan, Gomez & Sparks, 2014). At the same time, the relationship between personality traits extraversion and narcissism as predictors of SNS usage has been well established. For example, extraversion is associated with greater engagement on SNS (Ross et al., 2009). Narcissism may also play a role in that it captures the excessive interest in or the admiration of the self. Past research has thus report that users with higher narcissism tendencies also use SNS to maintain positive self-presentation (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

However, we do not know as yet whether extraversion and narcissisms also predict what personal life events are shared and with whom (but see work by Smith, Mendez & White, 2014). The study aim of the study was to address this research gap and (a) explore the influence that extraversion and narcissism have on the willingness to share positive and negative life events online with different contacts (e.g., friends, family, partner, colleagues and strangers) and (b) expected responding to such news.

Method

Participants

An opportunity sample of 112 participants completed the online study. The participants were between 18 and 53 old (Mean = 25.71; SD = 8.31). 86 participants were female, 24 were male (2 missing values).

Materials

An online survey was included six positive and six negative life events. The positive scenarios included: (1) positive health diagnosis, (2) a major physical milestone, (3) a new romantic relationship, (4) a new job, (5) passing an important test and (6) getting accepted into university. The negative scenarios used the same scenarios but applied into a negative context (e.g., negative health diagnosis, not getting accepted to university). Extraversion was measured using Goldberg et al (2006)'s extraversion scale from the mini IPIP scale (α=.78). Narcissism was measured using the NPI-16 (α=.78) by Ames, Rose and Anderson (2006). Social Networking usage and intensity was measured with the Facebook Intensity Scale by Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007) with questions reworded to apply context to social media as a whole rather than Facebook (α=.74).

Procedure

Participants completed the survey in an environment of their choice. Participants first read the participant information sheet and gave informed consent. Then they were asked to read each of the positive scenarios and stated who they would share the information with and who was they expected to respond. This was repeated for the negative scenarios. The social media usage and intensity scale was completed followed by the personality measures. Finally participants provided demographic information. The study taken approximately 15 minutes for participants to complete.

Results

Regression was used to test the two aims of the study. Age, gender and social media usage and intensity was used in the first step. Fro the sake of brevity, only significant results were reported.

Influence of personality on news sharing with different contacts
- *Friends*: Extraversion was a significant positive predictor of sharing negative life events with friends (b=.105, β =.0.45, t=2.327, p=.022).
- *Strangers*: Narcissism was a significant positive predictor for sharing negative life events with strangers (b=.039, β =.222, t=2.321, p=.022) and for sharing positive life events with strangers (b=.136, β =.313, t=3.440, p=.001).
- *Family*: Narcissism was a significant negative predictor for sharing positive information with family (b=-.071, β =-.252, t=-2.774, p=.007).

Expected responding from different contacts to news sharing
- *Friends*: Extraversion was a significant positive predictor of expecting friends to respond to negative news (b=.106, β =.220, t=2.361, p=.020).
- *Strangers*: Narcissism was a marginally significant positive predictor for expecting strangers to respond to negative information (b=.022, β=.165, t=1.764, p=.080).
- *Family*: Narcissism was a significant negative predictor for expecting family to respond to negative information (b=-.065, β =-.202, t=-2.163, p=.033).
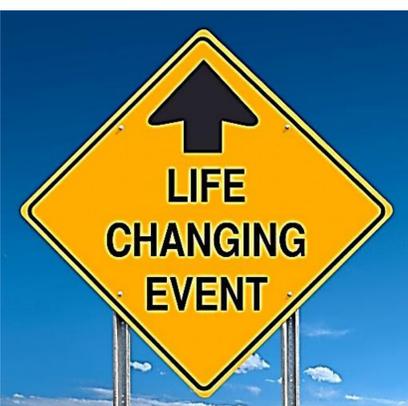
Discussion

Extraversion predicted sharing more negative information with friends and expecting friends to respond to negative information. These findings are supported by previous research that extraverts use SNS to communicate with known contacts (Seidman, 2013).

Narcissism predicted sharing negative and positive information with strangers and expecting strangers to respond to negative information. There results may be due to the fact that narcissists may want to be noticed and admired by others. Narcissism also negatively predicted sharing positive information with family and expecting family to respond to negative information. It is possible that those who ranked higher on narcissism are also careful what they reveal to close others and hence are less likely to share negative information for fear of being negatively evaluated by those close to them (Bogart, Benotsch & Pavlovic, 2010).

According to Greek mythology, Narcissus starved to death as he could not tear himself away from his own image. Picture by Caravaggio (1597)

The results raise several concerns. The fact that narcissists were more willing to share information with strangers suggests that these individuals may also be more at risk. That is, individuals with greater narcissism may not be aware of the dangers of sharing information with unknown contacts (such as identity theft or privacy violations), or simply ignore these in order to present themselves favourably to all audiences. Some evidence comes from Smith, Mendez and White (2014, pg. 78) who reported that narcissism was "related to increased Facebook exposure and lower Facebook vigilance, despite greater stated concern for privacy and security." Future research may wish to consider expanding the current study and the work by Smith et al (2014) by investigating personality differences surrounding privacy concerns in sharing life events with unknown contacts as this has yet to be explored.

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