

Chapter 51

The Role of Students' Personality Traits in the Effective Use of Social Networking Sites in the Educational Context

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ABSTRACT

By critically reviewing the theory and previous research in the domains of education, personality psychology, and Social Networking Sites (SNS), this chapter investigates the implications of educational SNS use for students with different personality structures. Conscientiousness is shown to be crucial for academic performance, with indications that neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness are important as well. With regard to SNS use in schools, the authors give a short review of the existing studies, which yielded contradictory findings when it comes to SNS's effect on academic achievement, but are fairly in agreement about students' positive attitudes toward their use in schools. As the main purpose, the authors present personality-related findings and make predictions about the benefits of educational SNS use for introverted and highly neurotic students and those with low self-esteem. They conclude that introducing SNS into the educational context would be valuable for all students, especially with regard to giving them equal chances in realizing their potential.

INTRODUCTION

Research into the use of social networking sites (SNS) has been a quickly developing field of scientific inquiry since the sudden increase in the number of users of SNS, the majority of whom are adolescents and young adults. It is not surprising that researchers have addressed the effects of this trend on academic outcomes, focusing on questions such as students' attitudes toward Facebook, its effect on adjustment

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to college life, characteristics of use in terms of frequency and motivation and the general relationship between SNS use and academic achievement. The findings obtained by this line of research are undoubtedly valuable in explaining how the expanding use of SNS relates to academic performance, but the influence of users' personality on potentially favorable or detrimental effects has been overlooked.

This chapter attempts to resolve this shortcoming by integrating relevant empirical evidence and theoretical assumptions collected in two areas of research – personality studies in the educational context and studies on the differences in the use of SNS. Firstly, we examine the existing evidence in the field of personality and academic achievement, focusing mainly on the dimensions included in the five factor model. Next, we provide an overview of research regarding SNS use and its relation with students' academic outcomes. The attitudes of students and teachers about the implementation of SNS in schools and universities are discussed – how students view the presence of teachers on SNS, whether they would like to use them more frequently in class and whether they feel they would benefit from this kind of merger. Furthermore, we try to address the issue of why SNS are not as represented in today's education. Finally, a brief summary of the available data on how SNS use affects students' academic outcomes is provided.

The main focus of this chapter is to present the SNS-related research in the field of personality psychology and draw hypotheses on how personality might alter the effect of SNS use in schools on students' academic achievements. Based on the existing data, certain tentative conclusions can be drawn concerning the importance of traits such as extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness for the frequency and modalities of Facebook use. Conscientiousness has been found to negatively correlate with time spent on Facebook (Wise, Skues, & Williams, 2011), and although there are contradicting results, extraversion is generally an important predictor of SNS use in samples of young adolescents (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010) as well as adults (Correa, Hinsley, & Zuniga, 2010). Regarding this personality dimension, some authors have proposed that individuals with higher introversion, as well as neuroticism, use the Internet to become more sociable and connect with people in a way they are otherwise not able to (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Studies have also found beneficial effects of Internet and SNS use on adolescents' self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006), provided the feedback they get from the online community is positive. Individuals with low self-esteem may benefit from this form of communication as it enhances their social capital which can lead to better adjustment during transitional periods, indirectly influencing academic achievement (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2011). Finally, we discuss whether an SNS-based approach to education might be used universally, regardless of students' differences.

Since prior studies have shown significant correlations of personality traits with both educational outcomes and SNS use, we propose that further inquiry in this field could lead to a better understanding of the dynamic relationship between them, as well as produce a theoretical base for constructing a universally applicable online educational platform. Bearing in mind that technology can only move forward in time, it is important to examine all the possible areas of its influence and the differences between students in reactions to these new teaching methods, in order to avoid negative outcomes, but also to enhance productivity, motivation and student engagement.

A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL AND RESEARCH OVERVIEW

SNS have, from their onset, apart from being a supplement to traditional communication, provided users with new ways of communication and social interaction. Because of the exponential growth of the

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