Chapter 48

Face to Face(book):
Users' Traits and Motivations and Effects of Facebook Use on Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses personality traits of Facebook users, how personality traits and motivations explain Facebook use, and the potential beneficial and detrimental effects of Internet usage, in general, and online social networking sites usage, in particular, on social and psychological well-being. First, the author provides short definitions of concepts such as social media and Social Network Sites (SNS). Next, the author describes Nadkarni and Hofmann's (2012) two-factor model of motives associated with Facebook use, including the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. Afterwards, a literature review of the most cited studies on the association between Facebook use and personality traits, as conceptualized by the Big Five Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992), is provided, followed by research on the relationships between Facebook use and psychological dimensions, such as self-esteem, loneliness, narcissism, self-worth, and depression and suicide. Finally, conclusions are drawn and final remarks are made.

INTRODUCTION

From its humble beginning in 2004 to over 1 billion active users world-wide, Facebook has become a unique social phenomenon at the global level. Facebook's unique characteristics, the rapid growth of its use as a distribution medium and as a form of communication, the power and potential it has to change social behavior, and the impact it has on its users at a psychological level, are topics of constant debate amongst specialists. Given the complexity of Facebook phenomenon and its rapid growth, we, as individuals who aim at understanding it, seem to always find ourselves a few steps behind it, regardless of the position we stand on or our expertise in the field.

The Facebook phenomenon needs to be approached scientifically, like any other phenomenon that influences human behavior. Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines (ranging from psychology, sociology and economics, to management, marketing and computer-mediated communication) have recognized the impact of Facebook on human behavior (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012).

This chapter aims to discuss the findings of the past eight years' literature on personality characteristics of Facebook users, findings that might ease our understanding of the reasons why so many people are incorporating Facebook in their everyday activities.

BACKGROUND

Social Media, Web 2.0, User Generated Content

There seems to be confusion, even among scholars, regarding the definition of social media and the types of online services and applications that may be included in this category. The term "social media" is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking" ("Social Media", n.d.). Often, related concepts such as Web 2.0, user generated content and social media are used as synonyms; although these three revolve around the same general idea, they are different concepts and should not be used interchangeably (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For a better understanding of the concept of social media, and to eliminate confusion, a short discussion of how social media came into existence, and of the link between the aforementioned concepts, is necessary.

In 1980, Duke University graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created Usenet, a world-wide chat room that allowed users to read and post public messages. However, as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue, Social Media as we know it had appeared twenty years earlier, when Bruce and Susan Abelson had founded *Open Diary*, a rudimentary online social network that brought diary writers together in a community. The term "weblog" was used for the first time around the same period (1960's), and was truncated in "blog" a year later, when a blogger transformed the noun "weblog" into the sentence "we blog". The availability of high-speed Internet and the growing performance of web-based technologies had led to the growing popularity of the concept and to the invention of the online social networks such as MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004).

As mentioned earlier, the concept of social media is related to - but not interchangeable with - the concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (*UGC*).

The term Web 2.0 was first used to describe a new way of using the World Wide Web, i.e., as a web platform where contents and applications are created and distributed both by webmasters (software creators) and end-users (regular internet surfers), in a collaborative and participative manner (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus, Web 2.0 is not a new technology (although it is based on new technologies), but rather it represents a generic term for the new World Wide Web wave. Whereas before the Web 2.0 era the Internet had served only to feeding passive users with information posted by webmasters, after the Web 2.0 trend was introduced, the Internet became much more interactive. Now, the main purpose of the Internet is to generate and share new contents, reflecting the concept of participative web. Another feature of the Web 2.0, besides the participative culture, is that it facilitates users' access to a large number of applications (and not only data or information). Hence, Web 2.0 represents a stage for the evolution of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

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