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ABSTRACT:

Since its launch in February 2004, Facebook has become one of the most popular websites in the world, as well as a widely discussed media phenomenon. Unsurprisingly, the face book revolution has inspired a wealth of psychological study, which is growing exponentially. Most people act differently online than they do in real life. Whether we're more engaging, less polite or bolder in our political assertions, we tend to present our digital personas differently than we present ourselves in reality. In this paper, we review the recent empirical research into some of the key psychological themes concerning Facebook use. The review is organized according to common questions about Facebook culture and use being posed by academics and social commentators alike. These questions are grouped under three major themes, namely: (a) antecedents of Facebook use; (b) how individuals and corporations use Facebook; and (c) psychological outcomes or effects of Facebook use. To this end, we review over 100 recent publications (mostly empirical, peer-reviewed journal articles). We conclude by providing some suggestions for future psychological research in this rapidly expanding area of popular media culture.

Keywords: Facebook, social networking, social media, cyber-psychology, computer-mediated communication.

Introduction

The recent explosion in computer-mediated communication has led to a phenomenal upsurge in the availability and use of social networking sites (SNS). SNSs can be general or specific in nature (e.g., focusing on particular populations or activities), but they all provide a virtual platform where users can “present” themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others. One of the most popular SNSs is Facebook. Launched on February 4, 2004 (originally at <http://www.thefacebook.com>) and reliant on a continually developing, custom-built infrastructure, the site reached over 750 million active members. It is “one of the most-trafficked sites in the world” at times, more trafficked even than Google. Facebook’s popularity has increased the focus of considerable debate within the academic world. This has related particularly to the implications of its use on such areas as relationship-formation and satisfaction, identity construction, psychological and emotional wellbeing, personal professional boundaries, learning and privacy. While some of these issues have polarized opinion, the complex nature of Facebook interactions has been recognized and needs to be reflected in study of this medium. Indeed, global-level discourse on the role played by such SNSs as Facebook in catalyzing revolutionary social change only supports this need. The area of psychology concerned with the study of how and why individuals differ, and what consequences these differences have is likely to illuminate Facebook research. The fact is most people act differently online than they do in real life. Whether we’re more engaging, less polite or bolder in our political assertions, we tend to present our digital personas differently than we present ourselves in reality. But why exactly do we feel empowered enough to act a certain way on social networking platforms like Facebook? The site requires users to sign up with their real names, so we’re not truly anonymous or far removed from virtual conversation. Even so, our behavior online can be... less than charming. Use of SNSs can be seen more illustrative of a more widespread shift to an increasingly isolated, individually driven mode of interaction than has been featured previously in Western society. It is critically important, therefore, that we understand the differential psychological processes affecting behavior and behavioral outcomes within this context. Indeed, while there has been some study of personality factors in relation to Facebook, there remains a relative paucity of literature on this important topic. With hundreds of millions of differences that explain why people behave differently on Facebook and what effects that use may have.

Review literature

Professors Keith Wilcox of Columbia University and Andrew T. Stephen of the University of Pittsburgh set out to answer this question in their study titled "Are Close Friends the Enemy? Online Social Networks, Self-Esteem, and Self-Control," which was recently accepted for publication in the Journal of Consumer Research. In a series of five experiments, the authors illustrate the effects social networking has on individuals. Wilcox and Stephen's main argument states that "people present a positive self-view to others" when online.

A Utah Valley University study from 2011 found that the longer college students surfed Facebook, the worse they felt about their own lives.

Therefore, it's not too surprising that studies have been conducted to determine the relationship between Facebook usage and our behavior and its impact on our happiness, well-being and self-esteem.

Is Facebook Just for Young People?

Literature on social networking suggests that there is little difference between the personality profiles of the online and offline populations, the same is said to be true for SNSs specifically Facebook. Facebook is particularly popular with young people, especially those in college or university. Hargittai's 2008 study found Facebook to be the preferred mode of social networking for many young people. Concluding from this finding, it may be that the decline in use of email, hitherto the most popular mode of electronic communication can be explained by increased reliance on SNSs as an alternative way of forging and utilizing interpersonal connections. While users of SNSs such as Facebook come from a wide range of age and ethnic groups, older people can be less adept at navigating the site.

Are Facebook Users Really Who They Say They Are?

The first step to engagement in any SNS is for the user to set up a profile and, in doing so, create a "live" virtual persona (online identity construction). Virtual media settings, however, may initially seem to offer scope for control or variation of identity than in the real world; they seem to provide an environment in which identity is malleable and the reality or fantasy boundary can be blurred easily. Facebook, however, is "anonymous" environment. This means that users have some control over how they are presented, but not total control, because the activities in which they are involved online, and the people with whom they connect, also provide identity cues—and identity validation or

refutation—to other users. In this way, there are implicit as well as explicit identity cues, pertaining to communities of users rather than to the individual in isolation. Accordingly, Facebook users are far more likely to present a realistic, if slightly exaggerated, version of their true personalities (supporting “the extended real-life hypothesis”) than to represent an overly idealized virtual identity. That is to say, “various dimensions of identity claims appear to be grounded in offline realities”. Facebook users can personalize their profile page—which is divided into a number of sections— in several ways, using externally created “applications”, and this activity may have a reinforcing impact on self-awareness; for example, Gonzales and Hancock (2011) found that constructing and reflecting on self-identity through Facebook use would lead to greater objective self-awareness effects than traditional stimulus for objective self-awareness (such as a mirror). Perhaps unsurprisingly, people with narcissistic personality traits tend to check their profile page more frequently than other users, as well as spend more time on the site in general. In line, a study found that narcissism effects on Facebook use were mediated by the attractiveness and level of self-promotion evident in the user’s main photo online. While another study found that narcissism levels predicted the amount of self-promotional content in a number of core profile areas.

Privacy and Disclosure on Facebook: Who Tells What to Whom?

Although Facebook users take privacy seriously, information disclosure is manifest very differently in this virtual environment compared to the offline arena. Parks and Floyd (1996) highlighted the view that the mediated nature of Internet communication and (mis)perceived anonymity catalyzes freedom of expression such that people feel far more liberated online than they do in the real world. Specifically, Facebook elicits higher levels of general information sharing than the “real” (physical) world, as well as greater information disclosures, that is, more communication of personal or sensitive information. To some extent, this is even an expectation: “content sharing” has been dubbed one of the “most important criteria for the success of social network sites” and the increased acceptability of the reduced privacy associated with this was recognized explicitly by Facebook’s founder as reflecting a shift in “social norms”. Although there is evidence that people are becoming increasingly aware of the potential risks posed by indiscriminate information sharing online and that women, in particular, are more concerned with Facebook privacy than men users. An overall increase in the number of people searching Google with the term “delete Facebook” (Google, 2011) and such campaigns as “Quit Facebook Day” provide some evidence to suggest changing attitudes in this respect. Christofides et al. (2009) found that disclosure of information was predicted by users’ need for popularity, and that information control

was predicted by high self-esteem and/or low trust in others. They demonstrated, therefore, that disclosure and control are “different processes affected by different aspects of personality”. Ellison et al. (2007), suggests that people with low self-esteem may see information- sharing as a lever for gaining acceptance and are less choosy about those from whom they seek this affirmation, whereas “those with higher self-esteem are only concerned about popularity within their chosen circle”.

Conclusion:

Given the rapid advancements in technology and the ever-increasing demand among consumers for more and better ways to connect, communicate, and conduct business, there is considerable scope for ongoing research into the psychology of Facebook use. While this review has summarized some of the main findings with respect of the antecedents, behaviors, and effects relating to Facebook use, there are still gaps in the research to date that may be worth studying in more detail. Much study has focused on—or assumed—a psychologically “healthy” population. Because the profile of SNS users increasingly reflects the profile of the offline community, it may be worthwhile researching in more detail the impact of both nonclinical “dark” personality traits and clinically significant psychological conditions on Facebook usage and impact. There is also scope to explore in more detail the potentially negative impact of Facebook use.

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