Amy Chapman

Article Critique #5

23 July 2014

**Theoretical Perspective**

**Critique the author’s conceptual framework.**

The authors frame their study of personality traits and the use of online social networking sites through the lens of two hypotheses: one, that people who use online social networking sites are popular offline and that they use them to keep up with their extensive offline networks (the rich get richer hypothesis), or, two, that people who are less socially-inclined offline use online social networking sites to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interactions that they have offline (the social compensation hypothesis). We have seen this comparison before and it seems like an appropriate one to use for this study. The authors argue that, while there is some research which indicates that one’s personality on and offline trends differently, that in fact one is consistent across on and offline spaces. Given that the proposed research seeks to examine personality traits as they pertain to and are visible through online social networking sites, this seems an entirely appropriate conceptual framework for this study.

**Comment on the need for this study and its importance.**

The authors write that recently online social networking sites have become a main avenue of social interaction. This is a fair analysis and helps to make the case that research in the area of online social networks is necessary and could be beneficial. In spite of this, it seems that the use of online social networks has not been studied extensively or from a psychological perspective; all of this contributes to the necessity of research into this aspect of the field. The authors further mention that research has shown that online interactions mirror those which occur offline, meaning that those who are extroverts will likely have more friends both offline and in cyberspace. However, they also say that research connecting the use of online social networking sites to personality processes is uncommon. Thus, they have created this study.

I agree with the need for greater investigation into the use of online social networking sites and can see the potential benefits of knowing what type of people use them. The research further presumes to connect personality traits with the use of the online social networking site Facebook. I can see how this research would be interesting, but I am having trouble seeing its potential implications, treatments, interventions, or effects on the use of social networking sites or the way in which people interact with them. Therefore, it seems that the only benefit of this research is interest (which is valuable).

**How effectively does the author tie the study to relevant theory and prior research?**

The authors cite a number of studies which pertain to the use of social networking sites and some which connect whether a person is extroverted or not with their use of social networking sites. The research cited suggested that there are two possible hypotheses when it comes to online social networking sites: that people who use them widely are more social offline, or, conversely, that those who are more introverted are more likely to use social networking sites as it allows them to interact with people more inconspicuously. This concept takes up the majority of the literature review. The research about personality traits is minimal, included at the end, and not well explained. The authors could certainly do a better job with this piece of the research.

**Evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions or hypotheses.**

The research questions are not that clearly stated; in fact, I needed to read the article multiple times in order to find the research questions. The question of study 1 was to explore any associations between personality and numerous Facebook activities. The question of study 2 is similar to that of study 1, although the methods are different and so the authors are looking to support the results found in study 1. The question of study 2 is whether objectively observable characteristics found on Facebook profiles are able to be tied to personality traits. These questions are not clearly presented nor are they clearly worded. The authors would do well to situate the questions in the introduction of the paper before the methods sections of either study so as to focus the reader’s attention.

**Research Design and Analysis**

**Critique the appropriateness and adequacy of the study’s design in relation to the research questions or hypotheses.**

The study is two exploratory studies, seeking to find out if participants can identity personality traits from the Facebook profiles of users. The first study has a flaw in its design in that it completely relies on self-reporting for its data. The study asked participants to fill out questionnaires which measured their personality traits. This test, the Ten Item Personality Inventory, had been previously used and its validity confirmed, so it was a good choice to access the information desired about participants’ personality traits. Then, the participants were asked to fill out a separate survey to assess their Facebook use. The instrument used for this survey was an 11-item tool which asked both open-response and Likert scale questions to assess the participants’ use of Facebook.

The second study asked participants to come in with four other participants. The researchers archived Facebook profiles of participants and made the links inactive before the participants were told that Facebook was a part of the study. Nine undergraduate independent observers were asked to see if the participants’ Facebook pages were a match for any personality traits. The participants and those with whom they signed up for the study were asked to provide personality information about themselves and each other. Accuracy reports were created from the information provided by the participant and his/her four acquaintances. This information was gathered using an adjusted TIPI (Ten Item Personality Inventory) scale, one of the scales used in study 1. The reliability of this instrument is that it has been previously validated in other studies.

Overall, the design was appropriate to the research questions because it allowed access to the participants use of Facebook, provided insight into their personalities through three separate methods (their own interpretations; friends’ interpretations; and coders’ interpretations of their Facebook pages). It seems that the design can be trusted to have provided information that actually answers the research questions.

**Critique the adequacy of the study’s sampling methods (e.g., choice of participants) and their implications for generalizability.**

For both studies, the samples were convenience samples, taken from psychology subject pools of undergraduates at the universities where the studies were conducted. In Study 1, the methods of selecting the sample were not discussed. In study 2, it was clearly discussed that subjects were found through the use of flyers posted in dorms and throughout the campus; participants then signed up via a website along with four other friends (this was critical for the nature of the study). For their participation, they were paid $10, entered into a lottery to win $100, and were given course credit if they were enrolled in an introductory psychology course (most were). The generalizability of both studies is limited because the only participants were undergraduates at large universities. Further, both studies relied on volunteers, and so it is possible that either or both have volunteer bias.

**Critique the adequacy of the study’s procedures and materials (e.g., interventions, interview protocols, data collection procedures).**

The collection of most of the data was done through survey collection; it can be assumed that this was done well and thoroughly and without any unnecessary bias. The one procedure that was in place was for the observers who examined participants’ Facebook pages. This procedure seems to have been carefully thought out, ensuring that the research assistants did not know the participants and that they did not spend an inordinate amount of time in any given session trying to analyze the profiles for personality traits; presumably this cut down on fatigue. Further, the instructions given to these observers were as open-ended and neutral as possible, allowing the observers to make their own judgments. Overall, it seems that this procedure was adequate.

**Critique the appropriateness and quality (e.g., reliability, validity) of the measures used.**

The study aimed to measure participants’ use of Facebook and the personality traits that were associated with Facebook (or other online social networking site) use. The instruments that were used were appropriate and of decent quality: the TIPI, which was used in both study 1 and study 2, holds reliability from previous studies. The information gathered in study 2 was further verified by having both the participant and four of his/her friends take the TIPI to assess that participant’s personality. These instruments allow access to the information desired: the personality traits of the people being studied. The other measure used in study 1, the scale which assessed participants’ use of Facebook, did just that: it asked participants to measure their use of Facebook in open-response and Likert-scale questions. This instrument also allows access to the data sought.

**Critique the adequacy of the study’s data analyses. For example: Have important statistical assumptions been met? Are the analyses appropriate for the study’s design? Are the analyses appropriate for the data collected?**

The statistics which are done appear to be done correctly, meet statistical standards, and are appropriate to the study’s design. They are presented clearly in tables that are easy to read and understand. Finally, the measures are appropriate to the data that was collected. One additional table I would have liked to have seen was one indicating the amount of time various participants spent on Facebook. Other than that, the data analyses seem accurate and adequate.

**Interpretation and Implications of Results**

**Critique the author’s discussion of the methodological and/or conceptual limitations of the results.**

The authors of these studies did not in any way discuss their limitations except to mention that there were “no competing financial interests” (p. 487). This is a major limitation in and of itself that the authors chose to omit the limitations section of their paper. Further, there are a number of limitations in this study. Firstly, the samples are only of undergraduate students at two universities, which limited the generalizability of the study. Secondly, for study 2, people had to sign up for the study in groups of five. By definition, this means that people had at least four acquaintances with whom they felt comfortable enough to participate in a study. Since the project was testing personality and part of that is whether or not people are extroverted, it seems likely that the sample was skewed in favor of people who are extroverted just by the nature of needing groups of five people as participants. In study 1, the measures were self-reported, which further limits the generalizability and accuracy of the data. To the credit, the authors do mention this as a possibility.

The authors would have strengthened their paper by including a limitations section, including the above-mentioned points but also talking about the limitations of conducting two studies the purpose of which was to create a discussion which reflected the results of each of the separate studies.

**How consistent and comprehensive are the author’s conclusions with the reported results?**

The results of study 1 indicated that personality traits were seen in Facebook profiles. Online social networking behavior parallels offline behavior: online social networking sites are used by extroverts to extend their overall social networks (the rich get richer). People who used Facebook had higher measures of agreeableness as they viewed all of the pages in a profile more often than did those with low agreeableness. Finally, those who were low in conscientiousness and therefore were likely to be procrastinators were more likely to spend more time on Facebook.

The results of study 2 indicate that extroversion is related to maintaining social connections; openness is also correlated to having more friends overall, having more friends in one’s local network, and in the total number of networks. Participants who were observers were able to use the information provided in profiles to create impressions of people that were accurate. They seemed to use elements of information that were valid indicators of personality and did not pay attention to the aspects that were not part of personality.

These results are consistent with the authors’ conclusions. Overall, they concluded there are “a number of connections between personality and Facebook-related behavior” (486). They found that extroverts seek out online social networking sites more often, and that these extroverts are more engaged in the use of that media. The authors viewed this as online social networks being a part of someone’s broader world. Finally, the authors also concluded that they were able to show that people are able to use profile data to form accurate impressions of people they do not know. These conclusions are related to the results from each of the studies and the authors do a good job tying the two together.

**How well did the author relate the results to the study’s theoretical base?**

The authors do tie their research into previous research, but these ties are few and far between. The authors note that their research “converge with other research” and cite two studies, but they do not directly link the results of the cited studies to their own work. They also write that their research is consistent with previous research, but again they do not extrapolate on how this might be so. Further, the citations in the paper make it confusing to see which research they are citing because they are not the standard APA citations.

**In your view, what is the significance of the study, and what are its primary implications for theory, future research, and practice?**

Because of the writing, the citations, the lack of evidence, and the manner in which the studies were conducted, I am left unconvinced of the value of this research. However, assuming that the research questions are valuable and that someone in the field ought to be studying the connections between online social networking usage and personality traits, it would seem that much future research is needed. This research should include participants who are not already friends and those who are not undergraduate students. It should also be designed in such a way that there are objective measures of personality as a test of the reliability of the research.