Personality Characteristics and Social Media Use

Introduction

Research indicates that narcissism and the desire for fame are increasing amongst young people, which is of concern to many researchers (Ryan and Xenos, 2011; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell and Bushman, 2008). At the same time, social media usage is increasing and there is concern that the two may be related (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport and Bergman, 2011). On the positive side, social media have many uses that are not linked solely to individuals’ self-presentation and communications for example; social networking sites are used as a platform in the education delivery mix in many institutions, in commercial advertising, and as social marketing forums. Studies indicate that different people have different motivations and benefits from participation in social networking sites (Park, Fee, Valenzuela, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). However, there is still a paucity of research concerned with the relationship between individual differences and social networking (Muscaneill and Guadagno, 2012). This paper explores the associations between individual characteristics and social media use.

Background

At the extreme, narcissism is regarded as a clinical personality disorder causing a high level of self-absorption, exploitative, manipulative tendencies and lack of empathy (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Yet, narcissism is found in varying degrees in normal, mentally healthy people but have an inflated opinion of themselves and believe that they deserve special treatment (Bergman et al. 2011). Narcissists prefer to take rather than give and boost their self-esteem through public acknowledgement and association with others who are well known and generally admired (Twenge et al., 2008; Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Narcissists tend to boast about themselves, are fame seeking and are more likely to do enjoy seeing themselves in mass media. Whilst narcissists tend not to form long-term friendships, they do need social contact to fulfill their need for attention and admiration. One way of achieving narcissistic needs is through the use of social media (Carpenter, 2011). Social media may provide an opportunity for narcissists to engage in self-promotional behaviours (Ryan and Xenos, 2011) which is not to suggest that all social media users are participating for superficial reasons. Whilst narcissism is associated with self-presentation and boosting self-esteem, self-efficacy which is usually considered a positive attribute is relates to self-esteem with relevance to behaviour on social networking sites (Kramer and Winter, 2008). Along with an increase in narcissism in young people, the desire for fame is also increasing. Many young people believe that they will become famous even if they have no deserving skills or talent (Maltby, 2010). The desire for fame and narcissism are both associated with materialism (Ng, Tam and Shu, 2011; Rose, 2007; Rojek, 2001; Kasser and Ryan, 1996). Narcissism is a personality characteristic and appears to be mostly associated with extrinsic goals and focusing on these is found to be associated with low physical and psychological well-being (Kasser and Ryan, 1996).

As previously mentioned, modern technology allows individuals to promote themselves and social networking sites (SNS) provide an opportunity for gaining fame. SNSs provide an opportunity for their users to self-promote and present themselves in a grandiose, exaggerated manner (Bergman et al. 2011; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). The use of social network sites is a normal part of life for many these times when social networking attracts millions of users worldwide (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Various SNSs have large numbers of active users worldwide. Facebook currently has around 687 million, Twitter more
than 100 million and YouTube more than two billion hits worldwide each day (Bradshaw, 2011; Gelles, 2010). Social networking offers the opportunity for ordinary people to interact with others, for self-presentation and even a way of constructing a new or adapted identity (Mehdizadeh, S., 2010; Kramer and Winter, 2008; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). Although rapid and widespread communication with others has obvious benefits there are many concerns about potentially negative impacts associated with social networking (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport and Bergman, 2011). The key issues of concern, in this study, are associated with increasing narcissistic tendencies and the use of social networking sites.

Personality plays a part in materialism and narcissism but measuring personality for consumer behaviour purposes is somewhat problematic as it is often difficult to understand how personality affects behavioural decisions (Baumgartner, 2002; Albanese, 1993). Personality measures such as the Big Five and 3M examine personality traits at a higher level of abstraction that is not always appropriate for studying issues such as consumer decision making as the measures are designed for other purposes. Also, some of the well-known personality trait measures do not explain fully the individual characteristics associated with social media use (Moore and McElroy, 2011). Therefore, the development of instruments to measure specifically the nature and impact of personality variables associated with decision-making is desirable (Baumgartner, 2002; Kassarjian and Sheffet, 1981). Recent research has examined consumer attitudes and decision using four personality orientations Gountas and Brancalone, 2008; Gountas and Gountas, 2007). The research findings support the proposition of four major personality orientations: Physical, Thinking, Feeling and Imaginative. This approach proposes innate dispositional characteristics that drive the expression and fulfilment of personal values, attitudes and desires. The conceptualisation of four personality orientations does not suggest that each is a discrete type sharing none of the other characteristics. On the contrary, individuals have some of the characteristics of all four orientations, but in different proportions, and the individual will primarily display the dispositional characteristics of a dominant orientation. As an indicator of inherent disposition, personality orientation may be used to predict goals and preferences and studies using the personality orientation approach, have shown differences between the orientations and associated desire for fame, materialism and other aspirations (Gountas and Brancalone, 2008; Gountas and Gountas, 2007). As past research indicates that personality is apparent in the use of web pages (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008), it is likely that personality will also affect choice of social media and general usage. Various studies have shown that individuals’ different personality traits affect the why and how they use social media as well as influence their choice of social networking sites (Muscanell and Guadagno, 2012; Pagani, Hofacker and Goldsmith, 2011).

Specifically, this research explores the associations between a) personality orientation b) narcissism, c) empathy, d) materialism, e) desire for fame, f) self-efficacy and social media usage.

Methodology

Sample
The sample was collected online, using an existing database. The participants received a $5 reward for participation. The sample comprises 421 participants aged 18-30 years; 180 males and 242 females. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Measures
The questionnaire was developed using existing constructs. Sixty three items measure: Self-efficacy (Schwarzer and Born, 1997). The six item scale measures confidence and behavior in challenging situations.
Selfism (narcissism) and Empathy (Phares and Erskine, 1984). Selfism (narcissism) measures the extent to which the individual is willing to put their own interests ahead of others and think of themselves first ($\alpha = .78$). Conversely, Empathy examines the individual’s tendency to be sensitive and kind towards others and be actively caring and helpful ($\alpha = .83$). Each measure has eight items.

The Desire for Fame (Gountas and Gountas, 2007). The seven item scale reflects the general desire for fame and its anticipated outcomes associated with status, power and happiness ($\alpha = .92$).

Materialism: (Richins and Dawson, 1992; Richins, 2004). Materialistic tendencies are shown to be associated with the desire for fame. The six item Materialism scale was used (Richins, 2004), comprising two items from each domain: Success, Happiness and Centrality. The six items loaded on to one factor ($\alpha = .83$).

SatisfFeeling with Life (Diener, Larsen and Griffin, 1985) The five item scale measures the individual’s subjective assessment of their general life satisfFeeling ($\alpha = .86$).

Personality orientations: The four personality orientations items are an extension and adaptation of the four Jungian and Neo-Jungian personality orientations (Gountas, 2003, Gountas and Gountas, 2007). The four personality orientations are an adaptation of Jung’s (1923) personality conceptualization to measure individual differences and characteristics (thinking, action, physical, and imaginative). Each of the four personality orientations suggest a set of distinctive dispositional characteristics, which result in individuals having different preferences, values and attitudes towards consumption.

The physical orientation’s primary interest is the perception and understanding of the physical tangible aspects of the world. This orientation values the creation, accumulation, possession and enjoyment of materials, and the physical comforts they bring ($\alpha = 0.70$).

The thinking orientation’s primary interest is the need to understand and know how the world functions. This group values ideas, innovations, knowledge highly and enjoys learning how and why certain phenomena occur ($\alpha = 0.76$).

The Feeling orientation’s primary interest focuses strongly on experiential learning, emotively driven thinking and appraisals. These people have a need to make sense of the affective aspects of their lives and seek experiences that develop their skill in dealing with, managing, controlling and developing emotional understanding and intelligence ($\alpha = 0.75$).

The imaginative orientation’s primary interest is the world of new possibilities and ideas. These individuals use creative imagination, and fantasy to make sense of reality and what may happen in the future. This orientation makes decisions most often through intuitive hunches; physical possessions and comforts do not motivate them greatly ($\alpha = 0.75$).

The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, five representing “strongly agree” and one representing “strongly disagree”. Demographic information includes gender and age, and the participants were asked whether they are regular users of social media and if they are happy to share information about themselves, which sites they use i.e. Facebook, Twitter etc., how long the spend updating their pages, the importance they place on participation in social networks.

Results

Social Media Usage
380 respondents use social media regularly with 220 spending less than one hour per week to update their personal pages, 102 spending up to two hour 51 up to five hours and 49 more than five hours. 266 participants agree that participating in social networks is very important to them, and 293 are happy for others to see their personal information. Facebook is the most popular site with 389 users, followed by YouTube with 246, LinkedIn has 35 regular users, My Space 43 and Twitter 76.
There are significant differences between age groups in respect of the desire for fame with the youngest group 18-20 having the highest score of mean at 2.61. For gender, males score more highly than females for materialism, fame and selfism (narcissism) (mean = 2.95, 2.49 and 3.19 respectively) than females (mean = 2.77, 2.14 and 3.06 respectively). Females have a significantly higher mean score in empathy (mean = 3.72) than males (mean = 3.32). The respondents who regularly use social media appear to have a higher desire for fame and empathy. Facebook users have a higher significant score in materialism and desire for fame (mean = 2.87, and 2.33 respectively) than non-users (mean = 2.57 and 1.84 respectively). Linkedin users have higher desire for fame (mean = 2.78) than non-users (mean=2.25). My Space users have a higher significant score in materialism, desire for fame and selfism (narcissism) (mean = 3.21, 2.89 and 3.37 respectively) than non-users (mean = 2.81, 2.22 and 3.09 respectively). YouTube users have a higher significant score in materialism than non-users (2.93 and 2.74 respectively). Twitter have a higher significant score in materialism, desire for fame and selfism (narcissism) (mean = 3.07, 2.61 and 3.27 respectively) than non-users (mean =2.80, 2.22 and 3.08 respectively).

**Correlations between Individual Characteristics**

Table 1 indicates that there is a positive association between materialism the desire for fame and selfism (narcissism) (narcissism). However, these variables are not associated with satisfaction with life which has a positive association with self-efficacy and empathy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Bivariate correlations</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Materialism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Desire for Fame</td>
<td>.675**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Selfism (narcissism)</td>
<td>.422**</td>
<td>.287**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Empathy</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.187**</td>
<td>.326**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Satisfaction with Life</td>
<td>-.116*</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.395**</td>
<td>.502**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** sig. at .01, * sig. at .05.

Table 2 indicates the relationships between the individual characteristics shown above and the personality orientations.

| Table 2 Multiple regression for personality orientation and individual characteristics |
|---------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent variables                         | Physical | Thinking | Imaginative | Action |
| 1. Materialism                              | .566*** | -.200*** | .094 | -.064 |
| 2. Desire for Fame                          | .393*** | -.152 | .151* | -.007 |
| 3. Selfism (narcissism)                     | .213*** | -.054 | .073 | .128* |
| 4. Empathy                                  | .068 | .021 | .054 | .311*** |
| 5. Self-Efficacy                            | .023 | .179** | -.048 | .354*** |

*** sig. at .00, ** sig. at .01.

The analysis indicates different usage by each personality orientation. The Imaginative personality orientation attaches most importance to regular use of social media, particularly Facebook, My Space and You Tube and appear to be the group happiest for others to see their personal information.
The findings of this study suggest that the personality orientations differ in their association with the individual characteristics examined and their social media usage.

The Physical personality orientation has the strongest significant, positive relationship with materialism, desire for fame and selfism (narcissism). The physical personality has the strongest association with materialism, desire for fame and selfism (narcissism) but no significant association with empathy and self-efficacy. The Physical orientation appears to prefer MySpace and Twitter and consider the use of social media important.

The Thinking personality orientation has a negative significant association with materialism and a positive significant association with self-efficacy, but is least interested in social media and has no preference for any particular site.

The Imaginative orientation has a positive significant association with the desire for fame but no significant association with the other characteristics. The Imaginative personality orientation attaches most importance to regular use of social media, particularly Facebook, MySpace and You Tube and appear to be the group happiest for others to see their personal information.

The Feeling personality orientation has a positive significant association with selfism but also with empathy and self-efficacy. An explanation for this apparent anomaly maybe that this orientation is generally emotionally intelligent and able to monitor and control their feelings as well as understand others’. Therefore, they may feel comfortable in expressing their own needs but are able empathise with other people. The Feeling orientation appears to find social media use important, but show no particular preference for any specific medium.

**Discussion**

Overall, the study indicates that different characteristics, such as desire for fame and narcissism affect social media usage and choice of social networking sites. The findings are useful in understanding the association between certain styles of social networking sites and individual characteristics which have not been fully researched to date. For example, Twitter users seem to be most narcissistic, materialistic, have a desire for fame and a physical personality orientation. Clearly, this cannot be said of all Twitter users, many of whom may have completely different motivations, yet it is useful to explore associations with different personality orientations that have previously been examined in different consumer contexts. Considering that social media usage is increasing rapidly, research that allows insights into why and how different individuals choose and use social networking is useful to marketers on different levels in both commercial and social marketing. Greater understanding of how personality affects preferences and attention to communications’ styles in social media could enhance the delivery of social marketing information and education messages, particularly to young people who are using these media increasingly. Further research is needed to explore fully the individual traits that lead to different social media choices and behaviours. Future studies can test how these issues interact with personality orientation and examine the perceived consequences, benefits and problems associated with social media participation. Although, increasing narcissism, desire for fame and materialism is undesirable, there may be opportunities for using these tendencies for more prosocial outcomes.

This study lends further support to existing research that suggests personality is an important contributor in general consumer research and is helpful in application to different social media uses (Pagani et al., 2011; Moore and McElroy, 2011). The research is limited to a single study yet to be repeated, conducted in one country with a focus on young people. Future research needs to be extended to different age groups and demographic groups such as different cultural and ethnic groups, and behavioural and lifestyle segments.
References


Twenge, J. M., Konrath, S., Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K. & Bushman, B. J. (2008). Egos Inflating Over Time: A Cross Temporal Meta-Analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality 76*, 875-901.
