

Article Critique 5

Gosling, S. D., Augustine, A. A., Vazire, S., Holtzman, N., Gaddis, S., (2011), Manifestations of Personality in Online Social Networks: Self-Reported Facebook-Related Behaviors and Observable Profile Information, *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING*, 14:9.

**Theoretical Perspective**

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

Gosling et al. designed 2 studies to tackle questions regarding how personalities and online social network (OSN) behavior may be connected as well as how personality traits are expressed and recognized on Facebook profiles. The authors offer 2 models of which to construct theoretical frameworks for each study: "Rich Get Richer" (RGR) and "Social Compensation" (SC). The authors' argument lies in the belief that there exist connections between OSN behavior and personality and the belief that these connections may be represented by one of the hypotheses.

The authors' theoretical framework constructs a clear line of inquiry of which to investigate study one's research objective- how is facebook usage linked to personality? The 2 models of explanation, RGR and SC, provide appropriate hypotheses as both deal with, to some degree, frequency of internet use, but the opposite nature of their descriptions and the fact that they are the only 2 perspectives presented may induce an exaggerated interpretation of results heavily towards a certain model. The 2 models of explanation construct a weaker framework for study 2 as its inquiry relates to perception by others based on objects on profiles, rather than internet engagement-the phenomenon which the models seek to explain.

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

The authors argue the importance of researching the connections between Facebook engagement, profile objects, and user personality by discussing the prevalence of OSNs worldwide and how their presence may now provide empirically traceable domains of which to better understand processes of social and personality psychology in the real-world.

The authors provide a solid foundation to support the notion that OSNs may now be regarded as legitimate domains of which to observe and investigate social interactions. From this, it may be inferred that this work is needed because OSNs' increasing relevance on a global scale asks that aspects of engagement and behaviors that occur through them be better understood regarding how they influence and are influenced by people's personalities.

The needs for the particular studies in this article are fairly compelling. There is mention of a gap in research regarding internet engagement and personality that deals with OSN use and features. It is mentioned that implications drawn from these studies may contribute to better understanding how social capital is built and how existing social capital may mediate OSN behaviors. With that said, the research objectives (discovering if personality is expressed through Facebook profiles and behavior) alone, lack in their ability to convince the audience how better understanding their

phenomena will yield results meaningful regarding implications in target fields of interests-social and personality psychology.

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

The authors draw upon work concerning relationships between OSN usage and personality, differences between online and offline aggressive behaviors, and user abilities to predict personalities based on objective features of OSN profiles. The authors mention these works in order to construct their argument for the studies' needs as well as to use them to guide the design and measures used in the studies.

For the most part, prior works cited strengthen the studies' frameworks. The authors effectively tie prior research to the study with mention of work by Thompsen and Foulger (1996) regarding divergence between online and offline behaviors strengthens the justification to consider the SC model as a hypothesis to be tested. Previous work by Burke, Marlow, and Lento (2010) regarding findings that suggest a positive relationship between OSN use and social capital support the justification to consider RGR as a model for explanation to be tested. Authors also use prior research that suggests narcissism and extraversion are related to OSN profile objects which is appropriate in helping to justify the inclusion of study 2, but this argument could have been stronger if more work concerning how OSN profiles may reflect other personality traits such as introversion and selflessness was included.

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

The authors do not explicitly state research questions for either study 1 nor study 2. Study 1 discusses its research goals as seeking to examine associations between personality and self-reported Facebook engagement. Study 2 discusses its research goals as seeking to investigate how objectively assessed observable information found on Facebook profiles is associated with personality traits..

Despite no research questions formally presented, research inquiries are supported by the theoretical framework which deals with examining online and offline behavioral differences and how personality may be reflected by OSN profiles. The introduction constructs a clear line of inference of which to arrive at the topic of interest for study 1. With that said, it is stated on page 483, that "...research focusing specifically on personality processes in online contexts is scarce" (paragraph 4), and study one's research goal doesn't adequately address how it differs from investigating socialization processes to personality process. Work cited regarding OSN profile objects being connected to extraversion and narcissism is appropriately related to study two's goal of investigating if profile features on Facebook indicate personality as interpreted by others. The research goals are also appropriate given study one's call to investigate behavior that leaves residue which was acknowledged as a limitation of the study. Study 2 does not as adequately connect to the article's framework, as its research goals are not as clearly described in terms of the 2 models of explanation, RGR and SC, as study 1.

## **Research Design and Analysis**

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

Study 1 examined the relationship between personality and Facebook behavior through correlational design. Study 2 was also designed as a correlational study, examining possible associations between features (residue) on Facebook profiles and observer assessments of the personality based on the Facebook profile.

Correlational design was an appropriate choice of methodology given that the studies sought to investigate possible connections among behavior and personality. It's also appropriate as the body of knowledge surrounding Facebook behaviors is limited, and a correlational design is an adequate method to uncover possible connections among the variables of interest. Regarding study 2, it allowed investigation of the research inquiry which was interested in exploring possible associations among objectively assessed observable information found on Facebook profiles and personality traits. The methodologies for both studies are appropriate but could have better pursued investigating the processes behind Facebook engagement and profile assessment through a design that integrated more qualitative measures as these may provide more insight into the reasoning behind assessment and engagement in ways result-oriented methods do.

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

A convenience sample from a psychology subject pool at a university was used. The majority of this sample was white and female for study 1.

For study 2, participants from a different university were recruited via dorm flyers and verbal announcement. All participants were compensated financially. Students enrolled in an introductory psychology course (N = 76) were granted class credit as well. The majority of this sample was female with white and Asian being the most represented ethnicities.

Study one's sample allowed for fair investigation of the research question. All participants, spare a few, were regular Facebook users which is not only appropriate but necessary to investigate the research interests. Sampling from a single class within a single school reduces generalizability to college age students in that geographic region. The non-random nature of sampling within the psychology subject pool (subjects signed up) also reduces generalizability in that participants, though not completely voluntarily, consciously chose to participate in this particular study out of other available studies.

For study 2, the sample was appropriate in that it included participants who reflected competencies of interacting on Facebook and to that end, fairly accurately represented Facebook users in how profiles are assessed. This sample came with generalizability limitations similar to study one's. This study also financially incentivized participants, raising concerns that this study may have represented a population more motivated by money than others.

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

Personality questionnaires were administered to determine scores for the Big Five dimensions of personality. Targets, informants, and observers all completed this inventory in a laboratory setting. For study 2, profile objects were coded, observer ratings were conducted to gather

information regarding how personalities are interpreted through profiles, and accuracy criteria was gathered by asking targets and good friends to complete TIPIs.

The methodologies for both studies are appropriate but could have better pursued investigating the processes behind Facebook engagement and profile assessment through a design that integrated more qualitative measures as these may provide more insight into the reasoning behind assessment and engagement in ways result-oriented methods do. The procedures are adequate for establishing correlations of variables, consistent with the studies' designs, but they did not adequately address the research questions pertaining to personality process (page 483, paragraph 4).

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

Both studies employed assessed five factor model (FFM) personality traits using the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) to measure the Big Five personality dimensions. Facebook activity was measured using questionnaires with 2 open ended numeric items and the rest consisting of likert scale items (1-5). Profile objects were coded, observer ratings were conducted to gather information regarding how personalities are interpreted through profiles, and accuracy criteria was gathered by asking targets and good friends to complete TIPIs.

TIPI as an assessment of personality is an appropriate measure for the Big Five dimensions. TIPI is discussed as showing high levels of convergence with the Big Five inventory. Self-reports were an appropriate measure of frequency of engagement. Validity was weakened because of the nature of the questionnaires since they may measure perceptions rather than actual behaviors.

The profile presented to the observers may not have been internally valid in reflecting a natural Facebook profile. Links were not active, observers could only view the main timeline, and only a small percentage of photos were available to view. This weak representation limited the natural behaviors of which observers may engage when assessing personalities outside the study. The study took appropriate action to establish personality values by employing measures of accuracy criteria in addition to the observer ratings. Although observer ratings and self-ratings on TIPI on their own may raise concerns of validity when measuring personality, considering both improved reliability of values as there is a group of which to compare observer ratings.

### **Critique the adequacy of the study's data analyses**

Correlational tests were run for both studies. For study 1, Facebook engagement was tested with TIPI, and for study 2, FFM traits assessed by targets, informants, and observers were tested with Facebook profile objects.

Correlation tests are appropriate in that the authors sought to examine possible associations among personality and Facebook behaviors/objects. Further analyses to test for variability among independent measure influence on dependent measures (ANOVA) would have increased the adequacy of results and assisted in better guiding the discussion as correlation tests alone establish association but provide little insight into the process- an interest of the study, of personality on Facebook.

## **Interpretation and Implications of Results**

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

The authors discuss how some personality aspects fail to satisfy requirements of the Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM). Self-reports were also acknowledged to possibly measure perception rather than actual activity.

The external validity of this study is a major methodological limitation of this study as data was collected solely from college students in specific regions. It would be inappropriate to generalize that attitudes and personalities of this population interact with Facebook engagement and evaluation similarly to other age groups in all locations. It should also be mentioned that though actions were taken to increase the accuracy of profile assessments, the averaged score of targets, informants, and observers, raises concerns of how true the value analysed reflected the actual personality of the person whose profile was being viewed.

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

The authors conclude that results indicate support for RGR model, discussing that OSN sites may exist as a microcosm of people's social worlds. It is also stated that observers were able to use profile information effectively to form impressions of targets. Openness on OSNs is discussed as being expressed similarly as offline.

Regarding support for RGR, results indicate that extraversion and agreeableness were associated with certain self-reported Facebook engagements, appropriately supporting the framework of the RGR model, but to conclude that personality processes operate through RGR is not appropriate as there is no research referenced to support the notion that these FFM traits are completely synonymous for increased social capital. Conclusions adequately acknowledge that for some, online and offline behaviors mirror each other, but though support for RGR was found in the results, it cannot be concluded from these results that SC is not still a legitimate model of explanation for some. The authors are unclear regarding their conclusions about openness as it is stated that openness was associated with cues that were not valid (page 486, paragraph 4) but the authors discuss openness being reflective of real life based on its association with these cues. Further, there is no research to support the notion that number of photos and groups are indicative of openness expressions such as exploring new activities and meeting new people as discussed in the general discussion.

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

The authors connected the theoretical base to the conclusions by discussing how the results indicate consistency with the idea that OSN behavior parallels offline behavior, agreeing with the RGR model of explanation. Consistency is also discussed between results of study 2 and the idea that observers are effective in assessing personality based on profile information.

The study's framework is appropriately referenced by the authors' discussion of the results relating to the competing hypotheses RGR and SC. The authors effectively argue that this study's result support previous notions that suggest OSN environments may act as an extension of individual's social world and that those who accumulate high social capital offline may

experience increases of it on OSNs. The authors speculate that OSNs may provide an environment in which procrastinators can avoid work- this is interesting but inappropriate given that this discussion is neither supported by previous research nor discussed by the study's framework.

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

This article contributes to the body of research pertaining to personality processes' relation to OSN engagement and object expression, specifically within the realm of Facebook. Its results hold implications towards better understanding how personalities are reflected on OSNs as well as how behaviors on OSNs influence perceptions of personality. This study reinforced the notion that OSN behavior may mirror offline behavior by providing evidence of the Rich Get Richer hypothesis, and its results prompt discussion of how additional aspects of personality such as attitudes and values are expressed in OSNs in relation to offline contexts. In addition to investigating additional dimensions of personality, future research should employ qualitative methodologies in order to better understand the processes of Facebook behavior (reasoning for posting or not posting pictures and statuses and rationale behind choosing friends and groups) and engagement (why do people spend so much or so little time on OSNs?). It should also continue to investigate the implications that understanding the dynamic between personality and OSN behavior has on educational outcomes (e.g., achievement, bullying).