Personality Traits, Boredom, and Loneliness as Predictors of Facebook Use in On-Campus and Online University Students

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the relationship between individual differences (Big Five personality traits, self-esteem, loneliness, narcissism, shyness, and boredom) and social networking behaviours in two samples of Australian undergraduate students, one enrolled on-campus (n = 93) and another in a completely online (n = 113) version of the same subject. Participants completed an online questionnaire measuring personality traits, psychological variables, and Facebook use. Negative binomial regression models showed that on-campus students with higher levels of neuroticism, extraversion, and loneliness tended to have more Facebook friends, however, no significant predictors of number of friends were found for online students. There were no significant predictors of time spent using Facebook per day for either cohort. Contrary to expectations, boredom was not a significant predictor of time spent on Facebook for on-campus students, but the low participation and completion rate for this on-campus group suggests that students high on boredom proneness were unlikely to have completed the survey.

KEYWORDS
Boredom, Five Factor Model, Loneliness, Negative Binomial Regression, Post-Secondary Education, Social Networking

INTRODUCTION
Personality Traits Predicting Facebook Use
Facebook was originally developed as an online social network to allow students to maintain contact with college friends once they left school. This led to Facebook being the predominant social network used by college students to keep in touch with former school mates after they headed off to college. Facebook is now open to all persons (although use is prohibited or discouraged in some countries) and has become the Internet’s most well-known social networking site with more than one billion active users (Facebook, 2013) who spend anywhere from a few minutes to more than two hours per day on this website (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arsenelauft, Simmering, & Orr, 2009).

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Much of the early research on university students’ Facebook use explored the relationship between traits from five factor personality models (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990) and Facebook use. Results regarding the relationship between broad traits and general use have been equivocal. Some studies have found users high in extraversion spend more time (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010) and have more Facebook friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010) other studies have not found these associations (Ross et al., 2009). Other studies have found relationships between these traits and more specific online behaviours, such as how much personal information users share and which Facebook tools are used (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010).

Openness has been associated with spending more time on Facebook and having more Facebook friends (Skues, Williams, & Wise, 2012) and using more Facebook features (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). Surprisingly, high agreeableness was not associated with having more Facebook friend (Ross et al., 2009) and there is mixed evidence for a negative relationship between conscientiousness and time spent on Facebook (Kalpidou et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2010). Only a few studies have speculated on relationships between personality traits and social networking on productivity (i.e., study habits and academic performance). Wise, Skues, and Williams (2011) noted that conscientiousness could moderate relationships with time spent on Facebook depending on the motive for using Facebook. If Facebook is a distraction, one might expect low conscientiousness to be associated with more time spent on Facebook; if Facebook is a medium for discussing study material with friends, one might expect the reverse.

**Psychological Variables Predicting Facebook Use**

There is an emerging consensus that broad personality traits may not be the most relevant predictors of online behaviour, and that more specific individual differences may be more appropriate (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Skues et al., 2012). More recent studies have investigated psychological factors such as self-esteem as potential predictors of Facebook use (Ellison, Stenfield & Lampe, 2007; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010), loneliness (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Sherlis, 1998), narcissism (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010), shyness (Orr, Sisic, Ross, Simmering, Arseneaut, & Orr, 2009) and boredom (Pempek et al., 2009). The idea that the Internet is source of distraction for many has been widely discussed (e.g., Carr, 2010), and boredom, or need for stimulation is of increasing interest with recent studies (e.g., Wilson et al., 2014) appearing to show that many people prefer unpleasant stimulation (electric shocks) to sitting in silence with their own thoughts.

It is important to highlight that past studies have generally investigated single psychological factors in isolation, few have considered the simultaneous effects of multiple predictors (e.g., Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Skues et al., 2012). As with research focused on personality, findings vary regarding which psychological variables predict Facebook use, suggesting that predictors of Facebook use vary across different demographics such as first year university students (Skues et al., 2012) and general population samples (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

**Purpose of this Study**

This study aims to address two identified gaps in the literature on Facebook use. Firstly, it examines the simultaneous effects of multiple personality traits as a point of comparison with previous studies, and examines the narrower individual difference variables of self-esteem, loneliness, narcissism, shyness and boredom that may be more predictive of Facebook use in first year university students. Secondly, it compares two cohorts of users, students studying on-campus using predominantly face-to-face teaching methods, and students studying the same content online through Open Universities.
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