

Effects of Personality on Social Network Disclosure: Do Emotionally Intelligent Individuals Post Inappropriate Content?

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Abstract

The prevalence of individuals using social networking sites to stay connected has increased considerably in only a few years and the information posted is now being used by organizations for employee selection. The purpose of the current study was to investigate how differences on the Big Five Personality traits, honesty-integrity, and emotional intelligence influence whether individuals post inappropriate social network content. Participants were 506 college students from a large metropolitan state university in the Southeastern United States. Results suggest individuals scoring high on emotional intelligence and honesty/integrity disclosed less inappropriate social network content. Emotional intelligence was not, however, predictive of inappropriate disclosure above and beyond the Big Five Personality traits. Honest and emotionally intelligent individuals seem to understand the negative implications of disclosing inappropriate social network content. Future research should examine how social network information is being used in employee selection and the predictive validity of this method.

Keywords: social network, emotional intelligence, Big Five personality, inappropriate disclosure, hiring decisions

Introduction

The ease of communicating on social networks has resulted in a tremendous increase in users and has become a global phenomenon (Levy, 2007). Facebook, the most popular social network, was created in 2004 specifically for college students in the United States to stay connected (Eldon, 2008). While some social network sites were restricted to certain people upon their conception, now almost

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anyone with Internet access can create virtual profiles on sites such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, or Twitter. There are three characteristics that differentiate social network sites from other sites: 1) users create a personalized profile, 2) connections are made between users, and 3) users have control over who they connect with and can view other user networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Although not a defining characteristic, many social network sites give users an opportunity to upload photographs and users post an average of 88 photographs (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Mactin, 2008). For many users, social network sites create an outlet for communication and individual expression and researchers have only started to examine how individuals choose to disclose certain information and the implications of those decisions (Nosko, Wood, & Molema, 2010).

In response to the social network phenomenon, researchers from many disciplines have begun exploring impact on human behavior (Baran, 2010; MacDonald, Sohn, & Ellis, 2010; Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011). The implications of social network sites have even spilled over into the organizational environment and human resource functions such as recruitment and employee selection. Employers are beginning to explore the possibility of using personal information posted by applicants on social network sites for making hiring decisions. Several surveys of hiring managers suggest that between 20 and 40 percent have used or would consider using social network sites for making their next employment decision (Zeidner, 2007). Not much research has examined the validity of using this information in selection, but there is some evidence to suggest this information would aid in selecting more qualified applicants. For example, Klumper and Rosen (2009) found that trained raters were able to accurately assess applicants on four out of the Big Five personality traits, intelligence, and predict job performance based solely on Facebook profile information. Although there are possible benefits for employee selection, researchers also recognize some obvious problems associated with employers having access to certain personal information on social network sites, such as demographic characteristics which may trigger the perceptions of discrimination in employment decisions. Perhaps only time will tell whether social network information will become a viable and widely used tool for employee selection. The purpose of the current study is to investigate whether the type and amount of information provided by individuals in social network sites are predicated by the personality of the individuals. Specifically, individual differences in the Big Five personality traits, honesty-integrity, and emotional intelligence will be examined as they relate to the posting of inappropriate social network content. We define as inappropriate posting any information that would be considered as socially deviant if one were to present them in an employment interview setting. Karl, Peluchette, and Schlaegal (2010) review the different types of information posted on networks by individuals and identify a list of postings that are inappropriate in an employment context. The objective in this paper is to test if individual differences in emotional intelligence will relate to posting such inappropriate information.

Privacy and Disclosure in Social Networks

There are certainly some controls available to users of social media to restrict the information that is made public. The default privacy setting for Facebook, however, grants access of information to all other users unless the friends-only option is selected (Liu, Krishnamurthy, Gummadi, & Mislove, 2011). An online privacy survey found that even though Facebook users were cognizant of the many privacy threats, they reported that there were more benefits to using the networking site than privacy invasion concerns (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). In the same study, most Facebook users (i.e., 91%) claimed to be aware of possible privacy settings, but only 77 percent actually used some of these features. In another examination of privacy settings, Stutzman, Capra, and Thompson (2011) found that individuals who were aware of privacy settings and who customized their settings disclosed more personal information on social network sites. This suggests that social network users who take advantage of privacy settings feel safer and in control of who sees the information posted.

Although the perception of security in disclosing sensitive information is an important first step, it might not be sufficient. For example, Liu et al. (2011) found that privacy settings only met user expectations 37% of the time. Despite the availability of privacy features, Debatin et al. (2009) argue that disclosing personal information on social network sites still may be available to more than the desired audience because of reasons beyond the limitations of privacy settings (e.g., people have a tendency to accept acquaintances they hardly know or even strangers into their network). Considering that privacy settings have their limitations and sensitive information is still somewhat accessible, the current study will seek to examine whether disclosure behavior is predicated on the personality of the individuals. Specifically, we test if emotional intelligence influences what information is posted on such networks.

Personality and Inappropriate Disclosure

In terms of personality, the Big Five factors is the most widely used taxonomy of personality traits (Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, 2008). The five factors are extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism or emotional stability, agreeableness and openness to experience. The extraversion factor includes individuals who exhibit characteristics of sociability, assertiveness, gregariousness, and involvement (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Costa & McCrae, 1991). Individuals scoring high on the conscientiousness factor are characterized by being organized, purpose-driven, determined, and reliable (Costa & McCrae, 1991). Additionally, conscientious employees are typically higher performers and report higher life satisfaction (Barrick et al., 2001; Bruck & Allen, 2003). The neuroticism factor is associated with emotional instability; therefore, individuals scoring high on neuroticism may report greater anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, embarrassment, or

depression (Costa & McCrae, 1991). Overall, the research on neuroticism suggests employees scoring high on this dimension are less equipped to deal with stressful situations in the workplace (Bruck & Allen, 2003). Individuals who score high on agreeableness are described as being helpful, thoughtful of others and trying to please others (Costa & McCrae, 1991). Research suggests that these individuals may have a higher tendency to overexert themselves to please or meet the expectations of others (Bruck & Allen, 2003). Finally, openness to experience is characterized by the willingness to entertain new or foreign ideas and to be imaginative, curious, eccentric, and flexible (Costa & McCrae, 1991).

While the Big Five personality traits have been found in many different samples and settings, the HEXACO personality scale was administered in the current study because it includes the honesty-integrity dimension, which has potential implications for employee selection. Integrity tests have demonstrated strong levels of criterion-related validity for several job performance criteria, turnover, and for predicting counterproductive behaviors (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993). Further integrity tests add the largest incremental validity above and beyond general mental ability (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Finally, as integrity tests also capture impulsive unprofessional behavior (Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989), individual differences in integrity test scores may also be related to the disclosure of inappropriate information on Facebook profiles.

The Big Five personality traits have been found to significantly predict certain behavior on social network sites (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Karl et al., 2010). Although the networks of extraverted individuals were typically larger (i.e., included more friends on average than introverted Facebook users), introverted users tended to report more personal information on their profiles (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). In the same study, highly neurotic individuals were more likely to post photographs but there was no relationship between neuroticism and the likelihood of posting basic personal profile information. Users scoring high on openness to experience disclosed a greater amount of information in general and using more of various social network features. Facebook users high on conscientiousness posted fewer photographs and reported having more friends compared to users low on the same trait. Karl et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between the Big Five factors of personality and the disclosure of inappropriate Facebook content (i.e., Facebook Faux Pas). Their survey found that individuals scoring high on conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability were much less likely to post inappropriate content. In addition to investigating the relationships between the Big Five and posting of inappropriate content, the current study will also examine the effects of individual differences in honesty-integrity in disclosing inappropriate social network content.

Emotional Intelligence and Inappropriate Disclosure

The construct of emotional intelligence has only recently gained popularity in the realm of employee selection in comparison to personality. The criterion-related validity of emotional intelligence for predicting performance in several settings has been established (cf. Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004 for a meta-analytic summary of these validities). Emotional intelligence is a construct composed of several dimensions or facets of unique social abilities. One of the commonly used conceptualizations of emotional intelligence breaks the construct into ten distinct facets: emotion within the self (verbal and non-verbal), emotion of others (non-verbal and empathy), regulation of emotion within the self, regulation of emotion in others, flexible planning, creative thinking, mood redirection, and motivating emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The overarching subscales, therefore, measure self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 1998). There have not been any peer-reviewed research studies that have examined emotional intelligence as an individual difference affecting the disclosure of information, though the prospect for conducting such a study is promising. However, determining the effect of emotional intelligence on the disclosure of inappropriate information is theoretically complex, especially when considering that emotionally intelligent individuals may be increasingly aware of their own emotions and intentions, as well as the intentions and motives of others who may have access to the inappropriate information. More specifically, and in the context of disclosing information on social networking sites, emotional intelligent individuals will tend to be more cognizant of the negative social consequences of disclosing information and will understand what types of information are appropriate and inappropriate. In light of these proposed relationships, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- H1 – The disclosure of inappropriate social network information will be negatively related to emotional intelligence (EI).
- H2 – When controlling for Internet and Facebook use, emotional intelligence will be predictive of inappropriate disclosure above and beyond the HEXACO personality traits.

Method*Participants*

Participants were 506 college students (76.5% women) enrolled in a psychology course in a large metropolitan state university in Southeastern United States. The use of college students is appropriate as this population is likely to be the major users of social media, the next generation of job applicants, and what

they post is likely to be influenced by their personality characteristics. The mean age of the participants was 21.34 years ($SD=5.26$). The sample was diverse in ethnicity: White (13.9%), Black (10.9%), Hispanic (68.1%), Asian (4.2%), and other (3.0%). The high percentage of Hispanics is consistent with the population in this region. The majority of participants reported being employed (51%) and 72% of those employed participants worked part-time. About 46 percent of participants reported surfing the Internet for more than 6 hour per week and 42 percent reported using social network sites for 4 or more hours per week. The survey was completed online.

Measures

HEXACO Personality Inventory. The 60-item short version of the HEXACO personality inventory (Ashton & Lee, 2009) was used to measure the six factors: extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotionality, openness to experience, and honesty-humility. Participants responded to each statement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Sample items include "I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal" for conscientiousness, "The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends" for extraversion, "I like people that have unconventional views" for openness to experience, "Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do" for agreeableness, "I sometimes feel that I am a worthless person" for emotionality, and "I would never accept a bribe even if it were very large" for honesty-integrity.

Emotional Intelligence Scale. The 16-item emotional intelligence scale (Wong & Law, 2002) was used to assess participants' understanding and regulation of self and other emotions. Participants responded to each statement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). A sample item is "I always know my friend's emotions from their behavior."

Inappropriate Profile Items. We used the 10-item "Facebook Faux Pas" Scale developed by Karl et al. (2010) to capture individual differences in the posting of inappropriate information. Participants were asked to report (1 = *Very Unlikely* to 5 = *Very Likely*) how likely they would post each type of information on Facebook (e.g., ranging from a nude photograph to a comment about illegal drug use).

Reliability and descriptive statistics for all measures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Reliability for all Measures*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
1. Facebook Faux Pas Scale	1.51	0.58	.82
2. Openness	3.53	0.65	.77
3. Conscientiousness	3.80	0.56	.77
4. Agreeableness	3.21	0.59	.73
5. Extraversion	3.57	0.64	.81
6. Emotionality	3.37	0.61	.72
7. Honesty-Integrity	3.42	0.62	.72
8. Emotional Intelligence	3.96	0.53	.89

Table 2. *Correlations among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Facebook Faux Pas Scale	-							
2. Openness	-.10*	-						
3. Conscientiousness	-.25***	.25***	-					
4. Agreeableness	-.15**	.12**	.19***	-				
5. Extraversion	-.03	.27***	.32***	.16***	-			
6. Emotionality	-.13**	-.10*	.06	-.11*	-.09*	-		
7. Honesty-Integrity	-.35***	.20***	.27***	.24***	.06	.02	-	
8. Emotional Intelligence	-.14**	.29***	.45***	.38***	.51***	-.05	.18***	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Results

Table 2 provides the correlations between the HEXACO personality factors and the posting of inappropriate information. Honesty-integrity had the highest correlation with posting inappropriate information on the social networks. Individual differences in Honesty-integrity correlated negatively with inappropriate postings and the magnitude of the correlation (-.35) is much higher than that of any other Big Five factors. Big Five factors, such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, etc., correlated only -.25 and -.15, respectively, with the likelihood of inappropriate disclosure. These correlations suggest that although previous research were informative in assessing how the Big Five factors correlate with information disclosure in social media, they may have failed to address the most important facet of personality predictive of posting inappropriate content on the social media. It seems that the impulsivity captured by the sixth factor of HEXACO is a salient individual differences variable in assessing who posts inappropriate content on the social media.

Emotional Intelligence is a personality trait characterized by the ability to regulate and control the emotions of the self and others. It was predicted that individuals high in emotional intelligence would disclose fewer inappropriate content. Individual differences in emotional intelligence were negatively correlated ($r=-.14$, $p<.01$) with the Faux Pas scale suggesting that individuals high in emotional intelligence posted less inappropriate information. These results support Hypothesis 1. To provide a more detailed analysis, we also examined the effects of emotional intelligence on each of the 10 items of the Facebook Faux Pas Scale. After averaging participant responses on the 16-item emotional intelligence scale, a median split was used to define the high- and low- emotional intelligence groups. An independent sample t-test was then conducted to compare group means on the 10-item inappropriate disclosure scale (refer to Table 1 for total sample means and Table 3 for high and low emotional intelligence group means).

Table 3. *Means and Standard Deviations for High and Low Emotional Intelligence on Facebook Faux Pas Scale*

Variables	Emotional Intelligence				<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	High		Low			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Self-Nude Photo	1.08	0.46	1.09	0.44	0.28	0.02
Sex Prop Photo	1.13	0.53	1.20	0.63	1.20	0.12
Illegal Drug Comments	1.16	0.57	1.29	0.72	2.23	0.20*
Self-Photo With Firearm	1.26	0.80	1.37	0.82	1.60	0.14
Semi-Nude Photo	1.38	0.88	1.48	0.88	1.27	0.11
Violation of Student Code	1.31	0.80	1.49	0.83	2.41	0.22*
Sexual Activity Comments	1.33	0.81	1.47	0.88	1.09	0.17
Sexy Self-Photo	1.78	1.19	1.87	1.15	0.88	0.08
Drinking Alcohol Comment	1.89	1.27	2.13	1.34	2.08	0.18*
Self-Photo With Alcohol	2.12	1.37	2.31	1.37	1.57	0.14
Total Facebook Faux Pas Scale	1.44	0.57	1.57	0.58	2.43	0.23*

* $p<.05$.

Consistent with the negative correlation of $-.14$, the high and low emotional intelligence groups differed in their means on the Total Faux Pas Scale (the effect size was $d=.23$). Specifically, there were differences in the posting of information on alcohol drinking ($d=.18$), violations of student code ($d=.22$) and drug comments ($d=.20$). Individuals high on emotional intelligence are also less likely to post self-photos with alcohol use ($d=.14$).

The significant, negative correlation between emotional intelligence and the Facebook Faux Pas Scale provides initial evidence to suggest that emotional intelligence may account for a significant percentage of variance in the disclosure of inappropriate social network content. However, we wanted to investigate whether emotional intelligence predicted inappropriate posting over and beyond the personality factors. Therefore, a hierarchical regression was used to test whether

emotional intelligence provided incremental validity in predicting inappropriate disclosure of information beyond the HEXACO personality traits (i.e., Hypothesis 2). Control variables of Internet and Facebook use were entered in step one, the HEXACO personality traits were entered in step two, and emotional intelligence was entered into step three (refer to Table 4 for hierarchical regression results). Emotional intelligence did not predict inappropriate posting of information beyond the personality factors (i.e., the change in R^2 when self-monitoring was added in step three was not significant). Thus, support was not found for Hypothesis 2.

Table 4. *Hierarchical Regression for Faux Pas, Personality, and Emotional Intelligence*

	Facebook Faux Pas Scale				
	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F	df
Step One		.04	.04	10.39***	2,503
Internet Use	-.02				
Facebook Use	.21***				
Step Two		.19	.15	14.88***	8,497
Openness	.01				
Conscientiousness	-.14**				
Agreeableness	-.06				
Extraversion	.03				
Emotional Stability	-.14**				
Honesty	-.27***				
Step Three		.19	.00	0.23	9,496
Emotional Intelligence	-.03				

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The increasing popularity of social media sites has raised several questions for organizational scientists and practitioners. Researchers and practitioners have studied how organizations use this information in managing their human resources as well as the validity of such inferences. For example, Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010) found empirical support that less emotionally stable individuals were more likely to post personal pictures on social network sites. Other researchers (e.g., Ross et al., 2009) have found that personality can be reliably and validly inferred on the basis of the content posted on the social media sites. However, most of this research has used the Big Five factors of personality in their investigations. In our study we extended this research by including the Honesty-Humility factor as well as a measure of emotional intelligence.

As expected, the integrity factor of personality (Honesty-Humility factor in the HEXACO model) was more predictive of posting inappropriate information than

any of the Big Five factors. This is consistent with the validities reported for Big Five factors of personality and Integrity (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Integrity is an important individual differences variable (cf. Ones et al. 1993) and is also related to the posting of inappropriate content. We hypothesize that the impulsivity captured by the integrity scales is the driving force in this relationship. If our expectation is valid, then there are likely to be age differences in the posting of inappropriate content. On one hand, we would expect younger individuals to post more inappropriate content (due to youthful indiscretions) as compared to more experienced older individuals. On the other hand, the cultural settings in which older individuals grew up (the 1960s) may influence the older individuals to post more freely photos with alcohol or make statements of drug use. This interaction of culture and youthful immaturity is an interesting avenue for future research. Unfortunately our sample demographics precluded us from investigating the competing (and confounding) effects of culture and age maturation.

The role of emotional intelligence has been identified as a particularly important mechanism through which individuals decide what to disclose about themselves (Goleman, 1998). As hypothesized, individuals high in emotional intelligence reported less inappropriate Facebook content as compared to individuals low in emotional intelligence. On the item level, the means for the likelihood to disclose the various types of information was significantly lower for individuals high in emotional intelligence. Individuals high in emotional intelligence are able to regulate and control what they post and are also able to anticipate the reactions of others to that content. With this logic in mind, therefore, it is possible that Facebook profile information could be used to make somewhat accurate inferences about a candidate's decision-making and judgment abilities. As a result, these inferences could lead to the selection of more qualified job applicants. However, the validity of such inferences needs to be empirically determined.

Results from the hierarchical regression suggest that, when controlling for Internet and Facebook use, the Big Five personality and honesty-integrity accounted for a significant percent of the variance in inappropriate profile content. Considering that few studies have examined factors that contribute to social network disclosure content, this finding suggests that personality plays a significant role. It is interesting to note that the integrity factor was the best predictor (has a beta of .27, almost double of the next best predictor, emotional stability and conscientiousness both of which have a beta of .14). Thus, previous studies that have examined the effects of personality on posting of inappropriate information using the Big Five framework may have missed the most important personality dimension of integrity (cf. Ones et al., 1993; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Our results suggest that organizational researchers interested in the effects of personality on workplace behavior should examine not only the Big Five factors but also individual differences in Integrity.

We would expect that emotionally intelligent people would anticipate the reaction of others and their own associated emotional response, thus, making them less likely to post this type of information on social networking sites. However, when emotional intelligence was added into the third step, it did not provide a significant increase in variance explained. Thus, emotional intelligence did not predict the posting of inappropriate content beyond Big Five factors and integrity. These findings, although not what we expected, provide interesting insight into the function of emotional intelligence on social networking sites. Perhaps emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of posting inappropriate content because Facebook is strictly a social network; whereas, sites like LinkedIn are professional networks. In terms of impression management, therefore, it is likely that individuals would use more self-monitoring because the implications on potential employment are more salient for professional networks (Bolino & Turnley, 2003).

Some research has suggested that there are different types of Facebook or social network users: broadcasters and communicators (Underwood, Kerlin, & Farrington-Flint, 2011). In this theory, broadcasters tend to engage in more risky, widespread social network behavior as compared with communicators who do not. It is possible that those high in emotional intelligence would likely fall into the category of communicators and those low in emotional intelligence would likely fall into the category of broadcasters. It is important for research identifying clusters of social media users to also investigate the distinctive personality profiles of such clusters.

The design of the current study included the self-reported likelihood of posting various types of pre-determined, inappropriate social network information. We defined inappropriate information as any information that will not be disclosed in an employment interview setting. Future research should consider surveying hiring managers about what type of social network content would be detrimental or beneficial to an applicant's chance for employment. That is, the validity of the Faux Pas scale should be investigated. Furthermore, what is considered inappropriate may change from job setting and the generalizability of the scale to different settings and contexts needs to be investigated. The role of organizational culture and national norms need to be examined as well. For example, what is considered appropriate in an organic culture prevalent in many start-up ventures may not be considered appropriate in a conservative banking organization (Williamson & Cable, 2003). Similarly, what is considered appropriate in Western cultures may not be considered so in eastern cultures (and vice versa).

Research is needed to understand how organizations collect information from social media and what organizational and job characteristics affect such information collection. In a similar vein of research, there is evidence to suggest individuals are more inclined to disclose personal information (e.g., race/ethnicity) on the Internet than in person (Chet & Brown, 2007). If so, the question becomes whether we can assess personality of applicants without the confounding effects of

impression management by assessing the information on the social media. Researchers have argued that men and women differ in their communication styles and gender differences have been found in emotional intelligence scores (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). In our sample the Faux Pas scores for men and women differed significantly ($t=2.49$; $p<.05$). The means (and *SD*) for men and women were 1.62 (0.71) and 1.47 (0.53), respectively. Even when controlling for Facebook and Internet use, there appears to be a significant gender difference ($\beta=-.13$, $\Delta R^2=.02$, $F(3,498)=10.13$, $p<.01$). We did not find any ethnic or age differences in our college sample.

A unique feature of the social network perspective is that it involves the connectedness of groups and includes social processes such as affiliation, exchange, influence, information flow, and diffusion (Poole, Hollingshead, McGrath, Moreland, & Rohrbaugh, 2004). Social network sites are increasingly becoming more prevalent and are likely to play an important role in shaping employment relationships. Organizational researchers and social scientists should investigate the myriad of issues this generates and how organizations can leverage these networks in meeting their goals in recruitment, staffing, managing reputations, etc. Social media such as Facebook are a new trend and much empirical research is needed to understand the effects of this new trend on employment relationships.

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