Abstract

The social platform Facebook has more than one billion users. They visit their profile daily, interact with other members of the platform and disclose a lot of details of their personality through this interaction. The extent of such social interaction and self-presentation relates to some personality traits of the users.

The aim of this doctoral research study was to investigate these relationships in greater degree. To this end, three studies were conducted. In each study, personality traits of Facebook users were collected on the basis of standardized questionnaires. In addition, their online-profiles and user habits of the social network were analysed to measure the rate of self-presentation and social interaction.

Study 1 investigated the relationship between the personality traits open and covert narcissism, independent and interdependent self-construct, self-esteem, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, sensation seeking, self-monitoring and love styles (Lee, 1976) as well as their relationship to self-presentation and interaction on Facebook in 231 participants. Numerous relationships between the personality traits were found. In addition, higher values of personality traits were associated with a higher degree of self-presentation and interaction. Only agreeableness, interdependent self-construct and the love style Agape correlate negatively with the online activity.

Study 2 investigated whether there is a comparable positive relationship between open and covert narcissism, self-presentation and interaction in Russian and German Facebook users. To this end, the data of 72 Russian platform members were collected and compared with the data of 72 German members. In each group, a positive association between the two forms of narcissism and online activity was found. However, narcissism values did not significantly differ between the two samples. In contrast, there were some differences in the extent of self-presentation and interaction. For example, German users gave more "likes" and had more online friends than Russian users. Russian platform members used more applications than German users.

In particular, members of the “Millennial” generation (“digital natives”) use Web 2.0 and social networks. The results of some empirical studies show that this generation has higher values of narcissism than older generations. Consequently, some researchers assume that one reason for the rise of narcissism in the younger generation is its intensive use of the digital world. Based on this assumption, Study 3 investigated personality traits such as open and covert narcissism, self-esteem and sensation seeking as well self-presentation and interaction on Facebook in Millennials. Before data collecting, the Millennials were divided into two groups (younger Millennials: born from 1992 to 1998; older Millennials: born from 1975 to 1991). Each group included 127 participants. In both groups, there were positive relations between personality traits and online activity.
Younger Millennials showed higher values in the four personality traits, self-presentation and Facebook interaction than older Millennials.

In addition to the three studies, an excursus was also part of this doctoral research study. Here the latent variable “admiration seeking” was formed. This variable influenced the relation between the personal traits open and covert narcissism, sensation seeking and online self-presentation. Based on the idea that this latent variable could also be a personal trait, the “admiration seeking” questionnaire was constructed. During the construction process two samples (102 and 116 participants) completed the questionnaire. The final version of the “admiration seeking” questionnaire consisted of 28 items. It was used to measure “admiration seeking” in the two Millennials samples of Study 3. Higher values of “admiration seeking” were associated with a higher degree of online activity. Further, younger Millennials showed higher values of “admiration seeking” than older members of this generation.

The results of the three studies show which personality traits are related to the degree of online activity on the platform Facebook. Furthermore, it seems that traits like narcissism and sensation seeking, online self-presentation and online interaction are markedly higher in younger users. These developments could be caused by societal changes of the 21st Century, which are reflected in the online world. Perhaps, these changes influence the human personality and also lead to the development of new personality traits such as “admiration seeking”. These traits influence the young generation in particular which is in a state of personality development.

Keywords: narcissism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, self-esteem, self-construct, sensation seeking, self-monitoring, love styles, “admiration seeking”, online self-presentation, social online interaction, Web 2.0, social network sites, Facebook, Millennials (“digital natives”), cross-cultural comparison