

Personality Impressions From Identity Claims on Facebook

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Facebook profiles are routinely viewed and judged by others. We examined the categories of information that are utilized by observers and we tested the predictive validity of personality ratings based on Facebook Info pages. Raters made personality judgments of target individuals, either based on full Facebook Info pages or single categories of information (e.g., profile picture, interests, music preferences, etc.). Personality ratings for the Info pages were most highly correlated with ratings of profile pictures, followed by shared quotes and interests. Regression analyses showed that pictures and shared self-descriptive preferences independently contributed to impressions of Info pages. Stranger ratings of Info pages more strongly predicted online than everyday behavior.

Keywords: Facebook, identity claims, personality impressions, predictive validity, behavior

People browse Facebook profiles and decide whether to contact someone. Facebook profiles can also have consequences for the person beyond the size of their social network. Employers and college admissions officers check Facebook to get more information about the applicants, and judgments they make can be important in hiring or admissions decisions (Hechinger, 2008). The first goal of this paper is to examine the type of information that is most heavily weighed in judgments of Facebook profiles. The second goal is to test the predictive validity of judgments based on Facebook profiles in relation to everyday and online behavior.

A rapidly accumulating body of research shows that personality judgments based on Facebook pages can be accurate. For instance, when raters who do not personally know the target individuals judge their traits only from Facebook pages, their impressions significantly correlate with self- and informant-reported personality (Back et al., 2010). Moreover, strangers viewing Facebook pages are able to accurately judge targets' narcissism and likeability (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Weisbuch, Ivcevic, & Ambady, 2009).

While people are able to form fairly accurate judgments of others based on their Facebook pages, comparatively little is known about the kind of information that people utilize in making their judgments. The similarity between how people are perceived online and in everyday life suggests that judges use valid cues. Buffardi and Campbell (2008) found that Facebook judgments of narcissism were based on observations of quantity of social interaction and self-promotional content in profile pictures. Research comparing likeability online and in face-to-face interactions (Weisbuch et al., 2009) showed that expressivity cues were related to higher likeability in both social contexts. Expressivity on Facebook pages included cues such as the number of friends and photos, while expressivity face-to-face involved nonverbal cues such as smiling and facial liveliness.

Different parts of Facebook pages offer different kinds of information. Wall pages show behavior traces consisting of short posts by users and their friends. On the other hand, Info pages contain only information that users elect to share about themselves, including background information and self-descriptive preferences and activities. Thus, Info pages represent exclusively other-directed identity claims—statements reflecting how individuals would like to be perceived by others. In everyday contexts, identity claims from bedrooms and offices enable strangers to accurately assess their owners' personality (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). While past re-

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search on Facebook included a wide range of information (e.g., interactions on Wall pages, multiple photographs) on which observers could rely, this is the first study to systematically examine identity claims left on Info pages.

Facebook users upload a profile picture and many share a variety of self-descriptive information in categories such as interests, favorite music, movies, and quotes. In everyday contexts, all of this information can reveal one's personality. For instance, ratings of self-descriptive photographs correlate with personality traits (Dollinger & Clancy, 1993), as do media preferences and participation in cultural activities (Ivcevic & Mayer, 2009; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Weaver, Brosius, & Mundorf, 1993). When judging others on Facebook, which of these kinds of information are most readily used?

Profile picture might be an important source of information, since people routinely make judgments of others based on their appearance (Zebrowitz, 1997). Strangers are able to accurately judge traits related to extraversion and conscientiousness (e.g., competence) based on still photographs (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Rule & Ambady, 2008). Greatest accuracy of judgments is obtained when pictures show the whole figure with a spontaneous facial expression and posture (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009). Not only are impressions based on photographs accurate in relation to self- and other-reported traits, they are also accurate in predicting behavioral outcomes. For instance, ratings of competence, dominance, and maturity based on portrait photographs of Fortune 500 CEOs predicted financial success of their companies (Rule & Ambady, 2008).

Other important information is provided in shared preferences and activities. Music preferences appear to be especially diagnostic of personality in adolescents and young adults—they spontaneously discuss music preferences when getting to know someone, they believe that music preferences reveal a lot about who they are, and music preferences measured both by self-reports and observations of people's music libraries substantially correlate with personality (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). Moreover, when strangers are presented only with target individuals' 10 favorite songs, their personality judgments correlate with self-reports of personality (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2006). On Facebook, the goals of impression

management and attracting a broad social network might preclude people from fully sharing music (and other) preferences. A person might decide to omit a guilty pleasure and add preferences widely shared in a certain social group, which can limit the diagnostic power of stated preferences in personality judgments.

In this paper, we examine the sources of information used in making personality impressions based on identity claims on the Info section on Facebook. Previous research has studied personality judgments based on a wider range of information on Facebook (e.g., Back et al., 2010). While Wall pages contain at least some posts by one's friends, Info pages contain just the information that the user chooses to share about herself. For most people this includes at least a profile picture and for many it also includes preferences in music, TV, movies, books, interests, activities, favorite quotes, and an open-ended narrative called "about me." First, we ask which of these categories of identity claims yields impressions most similar to impressions gained from the full Info page. When multiple sources of information predict ratings of Info pages, do they reveal distinct information about the person? Our second goal is to test the predictive validity of personality impressions based on Facebook Info pages in relation to everyday and online behavior. For instance, do impressions of extraversion based on identity claims on Facebook predict self- and friend-reported socializing in everyday life, as well as observed socializing on Facebook (e.g., announcing social events, joking content)?

Method

Participants

The initial sample consisted of 104 undergraduates at a public university in the Northeast.¹ Because four students reported not having a Facebook page and one student did not give consent, the final sample included 99 participants (79 female; mean age = 19.72, *SD* = 1.56).

Participants were invited to bring a close friend to the assessment session in exchange for

¹ This study is a part of a large dataset on self-expression and social relationships on Facebook. Data reported in this paper do not overlap with data reported in other publications.

additional course credit. These friends completed a set of measures about the target participants. This friend-report data was available for 66 participants (42 female; mean age = 19.65, $SD = 1.46$). Mean friendship duration was 4.01 years ($SD = 5.48$).

Procedure

To get access to participants' Facebook pages, a research account was created and used to send "friending" invitations.² We saved Info and Wall pages multiple times during 3 consecutive weeks. All self- and friend-report measures were collected in a single assessment session.

Measures

Personality impressions of Facebook Info pages. Seven judges rated personality traits based on either the full Facebook Info page or single categories of preferences and activities (e.g., just the profile picture or music preferences). All judges were undergraduate research assistants in a social psychology lab, who were similar in age to the target participants.

The Info page contains the current profile picture, background information, preferences and activities participants shared, and contact information. Raters did not have access to photo pages or Wall pages containing communication between targets and their friends. Each set of Facebook information was rated on 1-item bipolar scales assessing Big Five personality traits (adapted from Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; extraversion: reserved, quiet vs. extraverted, enthusiastic; agreeableness: critical, quarrelsome vs. sympathetic, warm; conscientiousness: disorganized, careless vs. dependable, disciplined; neuroticism: emotionally stable, calm vs. anxious, easily upset; and openness to experience: conventional, uncreative vs. open to new experiences, complex). Because Facebook users elect what preferences to share on their pages, the number of participants for whom different categories of information were available varied as follows: "about me" narrative and books $N = 38$, activities $N = 50$, quotes $N = 56$, TV and movies $N = 57$, interests $N = 58$, and music $N = 61$.

Observed Facebook behavior. To create criteria of online behavior, Facebook Wall

pages were assessed for quantity and content of activity. Four research assistants received the following instruction: On a scale of 1–7, rate how much each page reflects different content. For instance, how much joking content is there (from *not at all* to *most of the page*)? Each variable was rated for Wall pages downloaded at two times, 3 weeks apart and averaged across the two measurements.

The pages were rated for the following content categories: announcing events (e.g., "Everybody invited to BBQ on Main Street"; $\alpha = .68$ and $.87$ for the two downloads), socializing (e.g., "Looking forward to the party"; $\alpha = .67$ and $.64$), joking/silly content ($\alpha = .71$ and $.72$), interactions (e.g., participants' commenting on friends' updates; $\alpha = .92$ and $.90$), participants' expressing emotions (e.g., "Stressed"; $\alpha = .89$ and $.83$), and academic content (e.g., "Studying"; $\alpha = .84$ and $.82$). Volume of activity was measured as the computer-counted number of words in participants' Wall posts.

Personality traits. Big Five personality traits—extraversion (e.g., outgoing, sociable), agreeableness (e.g., considerate and kind), conscientiousness (e.g., reliable worker), neuroticism (e.g., depressed, blue), and openness (e.g., original, comes up with new ideas)—were assessed with the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). The BFI is a popular measure of personality traits that is highly correlated with longer commercially available inventories (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). Participants self-reported their traits and their friends completed the BFI referring to the target individuals (i.e., rating statements starting with a stem "I see my friend as someone who . . ."). Ratings were made on a 5-point scale. Reliability was uniformly high (mean $\alpha = .81$).

Everyday social behavior. We created items assessing everyday social behavior in close friendships. Participants self-reported their behavior and their friends completed the

² Participants knew and consented to their Facebook pages being downloaded, but they did not know when the pages would be saved. While this might have influenced participants' behavior, we believe this was not the case because of two reasons. First, we were able to see all parts of the targets' profiles, suggesting that they did not selectively limit our access to their pages. And second, participants' Wall pages did not list many changes to their profiles during the course of our observation.

same questions based on their knowledge of targets' behavior. Two variables were measured: socializing (7 items; going to the movies or a concert, having dinner with friends; $\alpha = .80$ for self-reported scores and $\alpha = .74$ for friend-reported scores), and expressing emotions (6 items; e.g., talking about feelings, seeking advice; self-reported: $\alpha = .76$ and friend-reported: $\alpha = .74$). The items were rated on a 5-point scale.

Results

The results are organized in two parts addressing our research questions. First, we examine which categories of identity claims are used in forming personality impressions from Facebook Info pages. We correlate impressions based on single categories of information with impressions of corresponding traits based on full Info pages, and perform regression analyses to test whether different categories of information independently contribute to overall impressions. Second, we test the predictive validity of personality impressions from Info pages by examining their relationships with social and academic behavior in everyday and online contexts.

Use of Identity Claims Information in Judgments of Personality

As shown in Table 1, personality traits were judged with substantial reliability for many cat-

egories of preferences and activities. Agreement was highest for profile pictures (mean $\alpha = .76$), books (mean $\alpha = .74$), and open-ended "about me" narratives (mean $\alpha = .75$). Judges did not reach agreement for preferences in TV shows, movies, and music (mean α s between .40 and .54). The most reliably judged traits were extraversion (mean $\alpha = .78$), followed by agreeableness and conscientiousness (both with mean $\alpha = .68$). Neuroticism and openness traits were judged less reliably (mean $\alpha = .49$ and .58, respectively).

To examine what identity claims were most utilized in forming personality impressions, we computed correlations between trait judgments based on individual categories of information and full Info pages. Judgments based on profile pictures correlated most highly with personality trait ratings based on full Info pages, with correlations from .47 for neuroticism to .66 for extraversion (all $p < .001$; see Table 2). Full Info page ratings were also substantially predicted by judgments of quotes (correlations significant for four traits, r s from .43 for neuroticism to .58 for agreeableness) and interests (correlations significant for three traits, r s from .32 for extraversion to .42 for agreeableness). Regression analyses showed that both ratings of pictures and shared preferences independently contributed to ratings of full Info pages (see Table 3). We entered ratings of profile pictures and also interests and favorite quotes (most highly utilized identity claims) into a regression predicting traits rated from full Info pages.³ For each of the traits, shared identity claims (interests, quotes) contributed to the ratings of full Info pages independent of profile pictures. While profile pictures predicted all personality traits ($\beta = .38$ for agreeableness, .40 for conscientiousness, and .59 for extraversion), interests independently predicted extraversion ($\beta =$

Table 1
Interrater Reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients) for Big Five Traits Based on Different Categories of Identity Claims on Facebook Info Pages

	E	A	C	N	O
Picture	.87	.82	.75	.69	.68
Music	.69	.53	.42	.38	.67
Interests	.78	.66	.72	.56	.63
Books	.73	.80	.84	.64	.71
Activities	.80	.78	.83	.52	.76
About me	.85	.73	.82	.79	.55
TV	.66	.49	.53	.16	.16
Quotes	.84	.89	.79	.64	.29
Movies	.80	.42	.34	.03	.72
Full profile	.83	.69	.77	.53	.62

Note. A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, N = neuroticism, O = openness to experience.

³ Regression analysis was not run predicting impressions of neuroticism and openness because ratings of these traits based on users' interests and quotes did not have satisfactory reliability. Because the number of participants who shared both interests and favorite quotes on their Facebook profile pages was small ($N = 37$), we ran another set of analyses predicting full Info page ratings from profile pictures and either interests or quotes (N s = 58 and 56, respectively). In each analysis, shared identity claims (interests or quotes) predicted full Info page ratings independently of profile pictures.

Table 2
Correlations Between Ratings of Corresponding Personality Traits Based on Full Facebook Info Pages and Individual Categories of Identity Claims

	Full profile rating				
	E	A	C	N	O
Picture	.66***	.64***	.62***	.47***	.54***
Music	.09				.35**
Interests	.32*	.42***	.40**		
TV	.11				
Movies	.22				.25 [†]
Quotes	.48***	.58***	.54***	.43**	
Activities	.22	.28*	.43**		.08
Books	.20	.45**	.11	.10	.21
About me	.27	.40*	.57***	.09	

Note. Correlations are shown only for variables that were rated with satisfactory reliability. A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, N = neuroticism, O = openness to experience.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

.30) and quotes predicted agreeableness ($\beta = .39$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = .34$).

Predictive Validity for Personality Impressions of Facebook Info Pages

Extraversion ratings based on Info pages were correlated with self-reported extraversion ($r = .25$, $p < .05$), and conscientiousness ratings based on Info pages were correlated with both self- and friend-reported conscientiousness ($r_s = .29$, $p < .01$ and $.43$, $p < .001$, respectively). Agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness were not correlated with corresponding traits.

Table 4 shows correlations between personality impressions from Facebook Info pages

with self- and friend-reported everyday behavior and observed online behavior. Extraversion rated from Info pages weakly correlated with everyday socializing (self-report: $r = .17$, $p < .10$; friend-report: $r = .26$, $p < .05$), but more strongly with social content on Facebook Walls ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). Similarly, neuroticism rated from Info pages correlated with expressing emotions, joking content, and interactions on Facebook Walls (r_s between $.21$ and $.23$, $p < .05$), but not with everyday behavior. Finally, conscientiousness rated from Info pages correlated with academic criteria in everyday life (self-reported SAT scores: $r = .26$, $p < .05$) and academic content on Wall pages ($r = .34$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This study examined identity claims on Facebook pages—self-descriptive information users share about themselves on Info pages of their profile. First, we examined which identity claims were most utilized in making overall personality impressions. And second, we tested predictive validity of these personality impressions in relation to behavior in everyday and online environments. We found that observers relied most heavily on the profile picture, followed by quotes and interests. Correlations between personality impressions based on Info pages and self- and friend-reported traits were significant for extraversion and conscientiousness. These traits are accurately judged based on observations of short samples of behavior (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992), as well as photographs (Naumann et al., 2009; Rule & Ambady, 2008). Because observers rely strongly on pro-

Table 3
Regression Analyses Predicting Trait Ratings Based on Full Facebook Info Pages From Different Categories of Identity Claims

	Facebook Info page ratings					
	Extraversion		Agreeableness		Conscientiousness	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Picture	.59	5.22***	.38	2.87**	.40	3.05**
Quotes	.20	1.63	.39	2.68*	.34	2.28*
Interests	.30	2.58*	.18	1.43	.14	.95
Model	$R^2 = .58$ $F(3, 35) = 16.34$		$R^2 = .55$; $F(3, 35) = 14.26$		$R^2 = .46$; $F(3, 35) = 9.88$	

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

Table 4
Correlations Between Personality Trait Ratings of Facebook Info Pages and Behavior in Everyday and Online Contexts

	Full profile ratings				
	E	A	C	N	O
Everyday behavior					
Socializing					
Self-report	.17 [†]	.11	-.01	.03	-.07
Friend-report	.26*	-.04	-.06	-.08	.01
Expressing emotions					
Self-report	.29**	.10	.09	.14	-.15
Friend-report	.19	.02	-.05	-.03	.00
SAT total, self-reported	-.18	.18	.26*	-.17	-.16
Facebook behavior					
Announcing events	.26*	-.01	-.05	.13	-.12
Socializing	.37***	-.10	-.07	.18 [†]	.08
Joking/silly	.38***	-.25*	-.27**	.22*	.07
Interactions	.00	.23*	-.09	.21*	.08
Expressing emotion	.01	.00	.13	.23*	.07
Academic	-.14	.05	.34***	.04	-.14
Word count	-.01	-.06	.18 [†]	.19 [†]	.12

Note. E = extraversion, A = agreeableness, C = conscientiousness, N = neuroticism, O = openness to experience.
[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

file pictures in making their impressions, it is not surprising that Facebook impressions agree with self- and friend-reports of traits that can be judged from photos. This paper goes beyond the literature on the relationship between personality impressions and actual traits to include the predictive validity of observed traits. Personality impressions based on Facebook identity claims were examined in relation to self- and friend-reported everyday behavior and observed content of Facebook Walls. These impressions from Facebook Info pages correlated weakly with criteria in everyday life, but more strongly with observed online behavior.

Although previous research has examined cues observers employ in forming personality impressions from Facebook (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Weisbuch et al., 2009), the scope of studied cues was limited to variables such as the number of friends and photos. We compared ratings of separate categories of preferences and activities and ratings of full Info pages and showed that observers were primarily drawn to profile pictures. Other identity claims were also utilized, especially favorite quotes and interests. These categories of information were often shared and showed substantial variability in their content. Although in everyday life, media preferences predict personality traits (e.g.,

Ivcevic & Mayer, 2009; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Weaver et al., 1993), personality impressions from TV and movie preferences shared on Facebook were not reliable. Similarly, even though there is abundant evidence that music preferences are diagnostic of personality in everyday contexts (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003, 2006), impressions based on music preferences shared on Facebook were not reliable. While many people shared their music preferences on Facebook, these were limited in content, largely referencing popular music from the charts, with almost no references to genres such as classical or country. This may be in part due to common music interests among college students and the homogeneous nature of our sample (largely female, Caucasian, and middle-class), but it also likely reflects self-presentational concerns focused on sharing information that appeals to the widest audience of potential online friends. Perhaps because of this, the shared preferences did not reveal unambiguous information about personality.

Unlike previous research examining validity of impressions based on Facebook pages in relation to self- and informant-reported traits (Back et al., 2010), we examined the validity of personality impressions from Facebook pages in relation to everyday and online behavior.

Furthermore, we focused only on Facebook identity claims; judges formed impressions solely based on Info pages and did not see photo pages or social interactions on Wall pages. Only impressions of extraversion predicted everyday social behavior. On the other hand, impressions of several traits predicted behavior observed on participants' Facebook Walls. For instance, joking content on Wall pages was related to impressions of higher extraversion and neuroticism and lower agreeableness and conscientiousness, and interactions with others on Facebook (e.g., liking posts, commenting) was related to higher impressions of agreeableness and neuroticism. These results point to the importance of the social context in forming personality impressions. When personality impressions are formed in one social environment, situational cues convey important information that contributes to successful prediction of behavior in that environment (e.g., Facebook), but not necessarily in another one (e.g., everyday contexts). Judges can incorporate knowledge of common or appropriate behavior in a certain environment when forming personality impressions and these impressions therefore reflect information about person by situation interactions. Because these interactions differ across environments, prediction of behavior outside the observed environment should be less successful. Future research could address this hypothesis by presenting the same information to judges either as obtained from a Facebook profile or as gathered from interactions between individuals and their friends, and test predictive validity of thus formed personality impressions.

This study showed that identity claims on Facebook pages leave relatively consistent impressions on others, that these impressions are based both on cues from the profile picture and shared self-descriptive information, and that personality impressions based on Facebook Info pages have predictive validity, especially in telling how people behave online. Identity claims can be examined in respect to the content of shared information (e.g., social interests, joking quotes, alcohol in profile pictures), as well as the kind of information that is shared (e.g., does one list religious beliefs, political affiliation, or contact information). Some of these identity claims are likely to be consciously left on the pages with the goal of self-presentation and making a certain impression, based on knowl-

edge about what others might like. Other identity claims may leave an impression without the user being aware of their effect on others. Future research should examine the reaches of one's knowledge of the impressions they are making.

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