

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND THEIR RELATION TO SELF-ESTEEM AND THE FEELING OF LONELINESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract: The study focuses on the issue of self-disclosure behavior of Facebook users in relation to their self-esteem and the subjective feeling of loneliness. Exploratory research has been conducted on a sample of 132 participants (64 men, 68 women), using quantitative methods. In particular, UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, Ferguson, 1978) and RSES (The Rosenberg self-esteem scale, 1965) were used to identify subjective perceived feelings of loneliness and self-esteem. To assess the level of self-disclosure among Facebook users, original method was created by authors. The results indicate the relationships between the investigated constructs, a positive correlation between feelings of loneliness and self-disclosure was identified.

Keywords: Loneliness. Self-esteem. Self-disclosure. Facebook.

1 Introduction

Self-disclosure in interpersonal interactions, in the sense of sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, is considered to be an important tool for creating good relationships. At present, quality relationships are emerging not only in the real world but also in the cybernetic world. While the phenomenon of self-disclosure in real relationships is nowadays a well-explored problem, self-disclosure on social networks has so far attracted relatively little research attention.

1.1 Self-disclosure in relation to self-esteem

Self-disclosure is the act of revealing personal information to others. In general, self-disclosure occurs mainly in intimate relationships, but may also be affected by other variables such as personality characteristics or situational factors (Allen et al., 2001).

There are two general levels of self-disclosure. Width includes the number of topics published, while the depth points to how much intimate and profound self-disclosure is. Although in the original definition, Derlega et al. (1993) emphasize the verbal component of self-disclosure, in his later work (2008, 2013) he also emphasizes the importance of the non-verbal part of uncovering feelings and opinions, for example by voice and gestures, and in some cases even the clothing we wear. This view is incredibly important for exploring self-disclosure on social networks, where non-verbal stimuli such as pictures and photos play a key role, while stimuli such as voice tone or communication mimics are missing.

Self-disclosure is an integral part of creating and maintaining intimacy in social relationships. As confirmed by Derlega and Berg (2013), close relationships and self-disclosure are mutually transforming and constantly affecting each other. Self-disclosure is strongly associated with trust, sharing very intimate information depends on the assessment of whether the information is in good hands and that is why we can feel psychologically close to someone who shares something personal with us.

The same approach can be expected on social networks where the likelihood of sharing personal information depends on the level of trust in an online friend and, moreover, in an internet service provider. In Sheldon's research (2009), it was found that the more social network users were confident about the behavior of their communication partners, the more they trusted them and subsequently opened up to them. Furthermore, self-disclosure also plays a key role in forming of social assessment as well as self-evaluation of the individual.

Self-esteem is usually considered to be a mental representation of the emotional relationship to oneself, i.e. the concept of one's own social, moral and performance competencies (Blatný, Plháková, 2003) and is a very important determinant of self-disclosure. Subsequently, self-disclosure is largely influenced by the self-esteem of the individual (Sahlstein, Allen, 2002). Because people with high self-esteem believe that they have very good communication skills, there are fewer constraints in providing personal information about themselves than among people with low self-esteem (Betz, Schifano, 2000). People with high self-esteem are more sure about their abilities, and therefore are more willing to reveal personal information than people with low self-esteem (Schimmel et al., 2001).

A person with a low degree of self-esteem cannot reveal himself to such an extent as a person with a high degree of self-esteem, because self-exposing brings too much risk. When people reveal their private thoughts and feelings, they become vulnerable to humiliation and they actually threaten their self-esteem (Baxter, Braithwaite, 2008). By presenting carefully selected information, however, it is possible to create the desired impression of one's person (Derlega, Berg, 2013). In other words, a suitable method of self-disclosure can be used as a self-presentation tool. Verbal mediated information, as well as attitudes and nonverbal behaviors such as appearance, gestures, or activity, are part of making the impression. Some degree of manipulation with the impression is obvious, especially the need to create a desirable image on social networks (Gibbs, Ellison and Heino, 2006). Thus, self-disclosure allows satisfying of the sense of belonging as well as the need to validate oneself through social feedback (Blumer, 2010).

1.2 Feelings of loneliness, activity on Facebook and self-disclosure

Loneliness is often defined as a painful, unpleasant or even anxious desire for another person or person (Kozjak, 2005). But there are many characteristics of loneliness. Based on an analysis of the main characteristics, Pinquart and Sörensen (2001) conclude that there are two types of definitions of the loneliness. The first type is the definition emphasizing the suffering, due to the lack of contacts, as the main characteristic of feeling loneliness. Woodward and Queen (1988) define solitude as feelings of loneliness and disconnection or estrangement from positive people, things or places. In addition, Sorkin, Rook, and Lu (2002) report that loneliness is an unpleasant emotional state that occurs when one feels misunderstood, rejected or estranged, and lacks social activity, society, and emotional intimacy.

By the socio-cognitive approach, loneliness is characterized as a discrepancy between what interpersonal relationships individuals do have and what relationships they would like to have. This approach also takes into account the possibility that the individual does not feel alone despite the relatively low frequency of social contact and also that someone can feel lonely despite the high degree of social inclusion (Pinquart, Sörensen, 2001).

With more than a billion users and growing popularity, Facebook is becoming another way to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships. Several studies (Sheldon, 2009; 2013) have confirmed that maintaining relationships and social interaction are the primary motivation for using Facebook. In order for Facebook users to interact, they must be revealed.

At present, there are two hypotheses explaining the link between excessive internet use and feelings of loneliness. According to the first hypothesis, the internet causes feelings of loneliness. Experts (e.g. Kraut et al, 2002) who support this hypothesis claim that the time spent online can distort real relationships. The internet isolates individuals and discards their sense of belonging to the real world. The second hypothesis claims that lonely individuals are more likely to use the internet due to

online social networks that are more accessible than the real ones and due to the changed online communication pattern (Morahan-Martin, Schumacher, 2000). Probably, there is a reciprocal relationship between loneliness and self-disclosure. People who are unwilling to reveal personal information about themselves and who receive less personal information about others may regard their relationships as less satisfactory and thus are more prone to feel lonely. On the other hand, loneliness and social anxiety can prevent effective communication and thus prevent self-disclosure as well (Bonetti et al, 2010).

1.3 The aim of the current study

The aim of the research is to verify the existence of relationships between selected factors (subjectively perceived feeling of loneliness, self-esteem) and the degree of tendency to be exposed on social networks. Another goal of the work is to reveal motives that lead users to manifest certain level of self-disclosure on Facebook.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

An occasional selection of participants was used to create the research sample. The sample size is 132 participants, with a sample of 64 men and 68 women. The basic criteria for participation in the research were age between 18 and 35 and at least occasional Facebook usage.

2.2 Methods

1. UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, Ferguson, 1978): 20 item scale to measure the subjectively experienced feeling of loneliness of the individual, as well as feelings of social isolation. The score reached in the UCLA questionnaire was distributed into three categories. Participants who scored between 0 and 20 points were not identified as lonely, the score ranging from 21 to 39 indicated an average rate of loneliness, and as very lonely, we rated the scorers ranging from 40 to 60 points.
2. RSES (The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) was created by sociologist M. Rosenberg in 1965, currently, it is one of the most widely used self-esteem scales. RSES has been compiled as a one-dimensional scale aimed at measuring the overall level of global relationship to oneself. The gross score achieved in RSES was divided into three categories. Participants who achieved scores ranging from 10 to 20 points had low self-esteem, a score ranging from 21 to 30 suggested average self-esteem, and those who scored between 31 and 40 points are perceived as participants with a high level of self-esteem.
3. Self-disclosure on Facebook: an authorial questionnaire aimed at detecting the extent and frequency of Facebook usage and performing individual activities. It also contains two questions aimed at identifying what constitutes the core of most conversations on a given social network and what is the most common reason for spending time on Facebook. In the last part of the questionnaire, the participants comment on the content of posts and statuses posted on their walls. The sum of the contributions from all the categories the participants themselves put in the questionnaire was divided into three levels. Participants who have added 0 to 15 posts in the last month have been rated as uncovering. Contributions in the range of 16 to 30 were considered to be the average and therefore the average level of self-disclosure. The participants with a high level of self-disclosure added 31 or more posts during the last month.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive characteristics

The research was attended by a total of 132 participants. Using the UCLA, we found that 49.2% of all participants did not experience feelings of loneliness, 28.8% of the participants were

slightly alone, and 22% of all participants felt strong feelings of loneliness.

When describing the characteristics of the self-esteem variable, we found that low self-esteem had 17.4% of the sample. Average self-esteem has 53.8% of the sample, and high self-esteem exhibits 28.8% of the participants.

The last of the basic variables examined is the self-disclosure of individuals on Facebook. Most participants are not revealing at all or only minimally (56.8% of the sample). The average rate of self-disclosure was found in 7.6% of our sample. A high rate of self-disclosure is reported by 35.6% of participants. 33.3% of our research sample is permanently online on Facebook. 53.0% of participants are logged several times a day. Every day, 6.1% of participants sign up. 4.5% of the sample is online 3-4 times a week, and only 3% of our sample is logged 1-2 times a week. Most participants spend on Facebook actively less than 2 hours (39.4%). 2 to 3 hours spend on Facebook actively 25% of participants. Option 4 to 6 hours marked 18.2% of the sample and 17.4% of the participants spent on Facebook actively for 6 hours or more.

Important is the reason for spending time on Facebook. Most participants (39.4%) are trying to keep in touch with their friends and acquaintances. The second most common answer was the effort to escape the boredom, which was voted by 30.3% of the participants. 7.6% spend their time on Facebook mainly because they want to meet new people there. The ability to talk to people about things they cannot talk to personally considers 17.4% of the time to be the most important reason for spending time on Facebook.

3.2 Relationships between self-disclosure, loneliness, and self-esteem

We used a polychoric and polyserial correlation to determine the relationships between the examined variables (self-disclosure rate, self-esteem, feelings of loneliness). We also used Bonferroni's correction to avoid the first-order error.

Results suggest that there is a relationship between self-disclosure on Facebook and loneliness. A moderately strong, statistically significant positive relationship between loneliness and the length of time spent on the social network Facebook [$r_{\text{poly}} = 0.426$, $p < 0.0005$] was identified. We also found a moderate, statistically significant negative relationship between loneliness and the posting of own videos [$r_{\text{poly}} = -0.438$, $p < 0.0005$]. Further, we have identified a moderately strong, statistically significant positive relationship between loneliness and the posting of family content [$r_{\text{polys}} = 0.449$, $p < 0.0005$] and a moderately strong, statistically significant positive relationship between loneliness and posting of gossip [$r_{\text{polys}} = 0.414$, $p < 0.0005$]. Above mentioned results are supported with using Mann-Whitney U test as well. We found the difference with a large effect [$U = 447$, $Z = -4.70$, $p < 0.01$, $r = 0.48$]. Lonely participants ($M_{\text{rank}} = 64.6$) are likely to reveal more on Facebook than participants with lower loneliness rate ($M_{\text{rank}} = 39.9$).

Relationships between self-disclosure and self-esteem are not supported by any correlation identified. But, when using Mann-Whitney's nonparametric test, we identified a statistically significant difference with a small effect [$U = 273.5$, $Z = -2.73$, $p < 0.01$, $r = 0.35$] between the group with low self-esteem ($M_{\text{rank}} = 38.1$) and high self-esteem ($M_{\text{rank}} = 26.7$) in the self-disclosure on the Facebook. Participants with low self-esteem are more self-revealing than participants with high self-esteem.

4 Discussion

The aim of the research was to verify the existence of relationships between selected factors (subjectively perceived feeling of loneliness, self-esteem) and the degree of tendency to be exposed on social networks (self-disclosure). Above mentioned relationships were supported by results.

Bonetti (2010) claims that the causal relationship between loneliness and self-disclosure is probably reciprocal. People who are unwilling to reveal personal information about themselves before others and who receive little personal information about others may regard their relationships as less satisfactory and are therefore more prone to be lonely. On the other hand, loneliness and social anxiety may prevent effective communication and thus prevent self-disclosure. Our results, however, suggest that the higher loneliness participants feel, the higher tendency to self-disclosure on Facebook they present. Thus, we could support the claim of Sanders and his team (2000). According to them, the use of the internet isolates individuals from the real world and deprives them of their sense of belonging and of the relationship with the real world. Thus, loneliness can become a byproduct of over-use of the internet because the time spent by online users often invest in online relationships that are artificial and weak and do so at the expense of real relationships. But there is also another view of the relationship between feelings of loneliness and the use of the internet. This view, based on the work of Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000), is based on the tendency of lonely individuals to use the internet more likely, due to online social networks that are for them more realistic than the real world. The internet provides lonely people with an ideal environment for communication with others. Online anonymity and lack of physical presence enable users to control social interactions. They can choose not only to whom and when to communicate but also have more time to compose messages. For some lonely individuals, this can lead to increased internet usage. According to Schimmel et al. (2001), people with high self-esteem are more sure about their abilities, and thus are more willing to reveal personal information in comparison to people with low self-esteem. Statistical analysis of data supports the existence of differences in self-disclosure on Facebook among respondents with high and low self-esteem.

However, Schimmel's claim (2001) is contrary to ours, as the data analysis revealed exactly the opposite relationships. Participants with low self-esteem are more exposed than participants with high self-esteem. Based on a more thorough analysis of behavior on Facebook, we can assume that participants with average and high self-esteem have stronger boundaries in what posts they are willing to add and which they consider not to appropriate for Facebook. They do not want to make Facebook a "window" into their lives and add only posts that they consider to be "harmless" (photos of trips, actions, plans for the future, posts containing success, ...).

The research was conducted with the aim to explore self-disclosure on Facebook in relation to the feeling of loneliness and self-esteem. Despite meeting the set research objectives, we would formulate some research suggestion in this area. Mainly, the research sample is rather small and that is why results are not considered as having strong potential for any generalization. For the future research, we would suggest to enlarge the research sample and take some important socio-demographic variables (e.g. gender, ...) into account.

Last, but not least, using quantitative methods for exploring behavior on the Facebook, and, especially motives for particular activities, seems not bring enough detailed results. We find desirable to include a qualitative approach, that could provide more rich data and help to understand individual experience and motives of behavior. However, the research focused on identifying young people's motivation to self-disclosure in online space or on exploring the context of self-disclosure and selected variables (feelings of loneliness, self-esteem) can provide inspirational findings that clarify communications phenomena in the 21st century that have retrospective effect on social relationships and self-esteem of the individual.

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