

The Effects of Personality Types (Introversion-Extraversion) on Promoting Feminism on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

In recent years, social media has served as an important, accessible digital outlet for people to easily express their thoughts and reactions about events, trends, and more to their friends, family, peers, and followers. Previous research findings and studies have focused on the growing role social media plays in promoting humanitarian, social justice, political, and feminist efforts and issues, as well as the effects of personality types on how people use social media platforms and the Internet. This research study specifically asks one central question: What effects, if any, do personality types (introversion-extraversion) have regarding how people utilize social media to promote feminism? Research methodology utilized for this study includes both primary and secondary research sources. These sources consist of a review of scholarly research and news articles that showcase similar studies and findings, as well as a survey. The survey, housed on Qualtrics, was conducted through a snowball sampling recruitment method under the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Ithaca College. The survey questions were designed to prompt participants (mainly Ithaca College students and young alumni) to explore their own understanding of their respective personality types, social media and Internet habits, and feminist activism efforts. The results from this research study show a slight correlation between the traits of introversion and extraversion and the corresponding statements regarding how introverts and extraverts post content about feminism on social media. This correlation was statistically significant, showing that, although slight, it was not by chance.

Keywords: Personality Types, Feminism, Social Media

1. Introduction

1.1. History of Social Networks

According to Pew Research Center, approximately seven-in-ten Americans today utilize social media platforms to connect with others, read and engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves.² The amount of social media users has considerably grown, from only 5% of American adults using at least one platform in 2005 to approximately 69% of American adults in 2016.² With more Americans adopting social media platforms each year, the overall user base has grown to be more representative of the general population in the United States. While young adults have become the earliest social media users and continue to use these platforms at high rates, more older adults are using social media in recent years.²

The most popular and widely-used of the major social media platforms is Facebook. As of 2016, Facebook's user base is broadly representative of the United States population as a whole (68% of Americans).² Other popular social media platforms that are widely used by Americans include Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and LinkedIn. Factors including age, gender, highest level of education,² and whether they are living in urban, rural, or suburban areas play important roles regarding the usage of these major platforms.¹⁶ For example, according to Pew Research Center, 88% of American adults between the ages of 18-29 and 79% of those between the ages of 30-49 used Facebook, compared to 61% of those between the ages of 50-64 and 36% of those who are 65+.²

Between December 2009 and December 2012, nine out of ten surveys conducted by Pew Research Center during this period indicated that women were significantly more likely than men to use social media platforms.⁷ On average, the proportion of women who used these sites was ten percentage points higher than that of men.⁷

1.2. Introverts vs. Extraverts on Social Media

In 2010, an undergraduate research study conducted by Erin Ryan Harbaugh at Elon University focused on the relationship between personality styles (introversion-extraversion) of social network users and their usage of Facebook. The goal of this study "was to determine if and how a relationship existed between Facebook use and personality type in that one personality type would use Facebook more often and for different reasons than the other, unrepresented personality type."¹⁰ The results from this study indicated that people who spend more than two hours daily on Facebook are viewed by themselves and others as more outgoing and extraverted.¹⁰

In 2013, a group of professors and researchers led by Dr. Andrew Schwarz at the University of Pennsylvania conducted a study titled The World Well-Being Project, which analyzes how Facebook affects people's lives and whether their real personalities are reflected in their social media habits.³ The team "analyzed 700 million words, phrases, and topic instances collected from the Facebook messages [and status updates] of 75,000 volunteers, who also took standard personality tests, and found striking variations in language with personality, gender, and age."¹⁷ Word clouds for each personality factor were created; dominant words in each cloud "were consistent with prior lexical and questionnaire work." Results from this study showed that extraverts were more likely to use social words including 'party', 'love you', 'boys', and 'ladies.'¹⁷ On the other hand, introverts were more likely to use words related to solitary activities, including 'computer', 'Internet', and 'reading.'¹⁷

1.3. Social Activism and Promoting Feminism on Social Media

A research study conducted by TBWA\Worldwide in 2014 shows that many young adults between the ages of 20-28 in the United States participate in social activism.¹ These actions range from donating time or money to participating in rallies or meetings. Seven in ten young American adults describe themselves as social activists.¹ Three in five young American activists are educated women in the workforce.¹

Another research study conducted in 2012 focused on social media as a tool to promote civic engagement and collective action. All 169 individuals from 53 advocacy groups of varying sizes and interests who participated in this study indicated that they utilized social media and online technologies to connect and interact with citizens almost every day.¹⁴ In addition, they believed that using social media helped them to fulfill their organizational and advocacy goals across various activities.¹⁴ The majority of the participating advocacy groups believed that social media "are effective tools for facilitating civic engagement and collective action,"¹⁴ which helped strengthen their respective efforts "through increased speed of communication."¹⁴

In recent years, social media has been utilized as an accessible digital tool for social activism efforts, allowing exchanges of public conversations and dialogues, and the use of hashtags to inspire awareness and change, without the limits of geographical barriers. In 2014, the hashtag #YesAllWomen trended for several weeks; thousands of women used it to share their stories about how sexism and violence had affected them. This hashtag came along after a shooting spree was executed by Elliot Rodger in Santa Barbara, California.⁶ Prior to this incident, Rodger had previously written about his anger towards women. In the same year, thousands of women used the hashtag #WhyIStayed to share their personal stories related to domestic violence and abusive relationships, after the Ray Rice domestic violence incident.⁶

In "Feminisms and the Social Media Sphere," academic researcher and journalist Mehreen Kasana notes that social networks allow for people to speak about a variety of social issues. Additionally, social media and solidarity have helped encourage people to think critically about what is presented regarding activism for feminism "by mainstream media and political voices."¹² She states that various online discourses have led to the growing perception of "divergent

lines of thought between different kinds of feminisms,” which gives rise to the question, “What is female emancipation and empowerment?”¹²

1.4. Intersecting Feminism, Leadership and Personality Types

An open-ended question that can be asked regarding the intersection of feminism, leadership and personality types is: “Can you be introverted and, at the same time, an (outspoken, or effective) activist for feminism?” Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*, states, “The place of introverts in our culture today is very similar to where women were in the 1950s and early 1960s.”⁹ Additionally, she notes, “Women who are naturally quiet feel as if they can’t be feminists or be powerful because of it. We really need to undo that perception.”¹³

Feminist Courtney E. Martin states, “... I’ve been thinking a lot about the kind of leadership model we are pushing for young women. I fear that too often we present leadership as something necessarily loud and a leader as someone who must seek the limelight. It’s understandable, of course, that the pendulum has swung in this direction; after all, we’re facing up against centuries of the reverse socialization—the ideal woman as demure, quiet, and in the shadows... But, sometimes I fear that in our well-intentioned advocacy for more assertive, more outspoken girls, we’ve sometimes made those whose style is naturally quieter and less showy feel as if they aren’t bonafide leaders...”⁴

1.5. Current Study

The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between personality types (introversion-extraversion) and its effects on promoting feminism on social media. The research question was: “What effects, if any, do personality types (introversion-extraversion) have regarding how people utilize social media to promote feminism?” The hypothesis of the study is that when promoting feminism on social media, extraverts tend to post content frequently and speak about what is on their mind. Additionally, while introverts do not necessarily post on social media as much as extraverts, when they do, they take more time and thought to post content about feminism.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted electronically through Qualtrics between January and February of 2017. Using a snowball sampling method, participant recruitment outreach was done through posting the link to the survey on the official Ithaca College Facebook groups, giving classroom announcements, and asking Ithaca College professors teaching related classes to share the survey link to their students. After the data was collected, the information was uploaded and analyzed through SPSS. All survey procedures and materials were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Ithaca College prior to beginning the study.

2.1. Participants

There were 212 participants in total, with 79.7% identifying as female, 16% as male, and 3.8% as other. One participant did not select a response regarding their gender identity. At the time the survey was administered, most of the participants were current students or young alumni of Ithaca College, and predominately in the 18-24 and 25-34 age range categories. Some participants were outliers in the higher age ranges. Regarding racial identity, 77.4% of the survey participants identified as White/Caucasian. 5.2% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 5.2% as Black/African-American, 8.9% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3.3% as Other.

2.2. Materials

The survey consisted of 22 questions that were divided up into four distinct sections. The Demographic section consisted of three questions that were designed to gather information about the survey population. The Social Media section consisted of 10 questions asking about the participants’ respective personal social media usage and habits. A statement was included at the beginning of this section to note that these questions referred to items that they post on their personal accounts, and did not include social media work they conducted for involvements, such as for student

organizations, internships, and employment. The Personality Types section utilized a set of 12 statements (based on the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) items, and personality tests, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) to determine introversion. Using Cronbach's Alphas Values, this introversion scale was found to be highly reliable (12 items; $\alpha = .826$). The Feminism section consisted of seven questions that asked for the participants' respective usage of social media to promote feminism. A final open-response question was included for participants to share any additional comments or insights regarding the research study. Overall, the survey questions were designed to prompt participants to explore their own understanding of their respective personality types, social media and Internet habits, and feminist activism efforts.

2.3. Procedure

Participants were instructed to access the survey on Qualtrics, where they agreed to give their consent to participate in the study and indicated that they were 18 years or older. Participants could skip questions or withdraw from the survey at any time without any penalty.

3. Results

As part of the survey, participants were asked to answer two questions regarding the statements, "I tend to post content about feminism on social media infrequently. When I do, however, I like to take the time in writing out my thoughts and opinions about what I am posting about." and "I tend to post content about feminism on social media frequently, where I usually express quickly what's on my mind at the moment." Participants who answered these questions had to select between the following choices for both: "Strongly agree," "Somewhat agree," "Neither agree nor disagree," "Somewhat disagree," and "Strongly disagree."

A correlation test was done on SPSS between the introversion scale and the statement: "I tend to post content about feminism on social media infrequently. When I do, however, I like to take the time in writing out my thoughts and opinions about what I am posting about." The two statements showed a slight relationship that was statistically significant ($r = .186$; $p < .01$).

Table 1: Correlation table between the introversion scale and the statement: "I tend to post content about feminism on social media infrequently. When I do, however, I like to take the time in writing out my thoughts and opinions about what I am posting about."

		Introversion	VAR00004
Introversion	Pearson Correlation	1	.186**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	203	201
VAR00004	Pearson Correlation	.186**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	201	207

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To test for correlations between extraversion and the hypotheses for this study, another correlation test was conducted between the introversion scale and the statement: "I tend to post content about feminism on social media frequently, where I usually express quickly what's on my mind at the moment." As the scale that was used in this study measured introversion, this test looked for a negative correlation co-efficient. Like the first correlation test, the two statements demonstrated a slight relationship that was statistically significant ($r = -.191$; $p < .01$).

Table 2: Correlation table between the introversion scale and the statement: “I tend to post content about feminism on social media frequently, where I usually express quickly what's on my mind at the moment.”

		Introversion	VAR00004
Introversion	Pearson Correlation	1	-.191**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	203	200
VAR00004	Pearson Correlation	-.191**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	200	206

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A comprehensive analysis of this data shows that there is a statistically significant relationship in a predicted direction, as both respective statements were made up of several distinct components. The results showed a slight correlation between the traits of introversion and extraversion and the indicated statements. Overall, the research study results support the behavior in the effects of how personality types (introversion-extraversion) play a role in how people utilize social media to promote feminism.

4. Conclusion

This research study adds to the growing body of literature that investigates the relationship between personality types and its effects on how people promote feminism on social media. Additionally, this study supports the hypotheses, which are: “When promoting feminism on social media, extraverts tend to post content frequently and speak about what is on their mind.” and “While introverts do not necessarily post on social media as much as extraverts, when they do, they take more time and thought to post content about feminism.”

There are several limitations to this study. Due to the subject matter presented, the survey appealed more to female participants. Additionally, the survey was primarily directed towards Millennials and students at Ithaca College, which is noted as a predominately white institution located in a culturally liberal area. The survey questions utilized in the correlation tests created relationships that were aimed in a predicted direction. Lastly, the meanings of feminism and feminist content were not noted in the survey. As definitions, contexts, and interpretations of feminism vary among individuals and groups, this may have led participants to have different opinions and thoughts about feminism when taking the survey.

This study can be expanded upon future research which may focus on specific social media platforms (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), targeting other age and racial identity demographics, and having more people of all gender identities to participate. It can also be conducted in different environments, which range from urban, suburban, and rural areas, as well as liberal, moderate, and conservative regions. Other studies may be done by basing the survey on promoting different social causes, such as poverty, political actions, and economics, on social media and how people’s personality types, as it relates to introversion and extraversion, play a role.

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