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Cross-cultural narcissism on Facebook: Relationship between self-presentation, social interaction and the open and covert narcissism on a social networking site in Germany and Russia



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ABSTRACT

The social platform Facebook has more than one billion members in different countries. Cross-culturally, the way users behave on this platform relates to some personality traits. The aim of the present study was to investigate, whether Russian and German Facebook users differ in the extent of open and covert narcissism, self-presentation and social interaction on Facebook. Furthermore, we investigated, whether there is a comparable relationship between narcissism and Facebook use in these countries. To this end, the data of 72 Russian platform members were collected and compared with the data of 122 German members. The narcissism values did not significantly differ between the two samples. This was also the case with the overall self-presentation and interaction. In contrast, some single measures of online behaviour differ. For example, German users set more “Likes” and had more online-friends than Russian users. Russian platform members used more applications than German users. In each group, a positive association between the two forms of narcissism and online activity was found. So far, the positive relations between narcissism and self-presentation and social interaction on Facebook seem to be universal in Western and Eastern countries.

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1. Introduction

In the last ten years, Internet and Web 2.0 became one of the most important ways for communication and socialization. Especially, so-called social networking sites¹ are used for this purpose (Moore & McElroy, 2012). They belong to the most visited online sites in the Web 2.0 worldwide (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Daily, many users spend a lot of time on SNSs, interacting with other members, independent of their spatial distance, and presenting many private details (Tosun, 2012).

Often, the interaction takes place between people who know each other in the offline world (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, 2011; Kujath, 2011; Ross et al., 2009; Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008). However, members also use SNSs to establish new relationships (Cabral, 2011; Hsu, Wang, & Tai, 2011).

One of the most popular SNSs is the international platform Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Mezrich, 2011). In 2015, more than 1.44 billion people use this site for their daily interactions (Protalinski, 2015).

1.1. Online behaviour and personality traits

Recently research showed that some personality traits are related to the way we behave on SNSs. Kosinski, Stillwell, and Graepel (2013) predicted a range of personality traits of Facebook members (e.g., openness and extraversion) by analysing the “Likes” on their profile pages. Similar, Back et al. (2010) showed that strangers who viewed a Facebook profile were able to predict the owner's level of extraversion and openness. Extraverted users show a high level of social interaction on Facebook (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010; Tosun & Lajunen, 2010). They have many online-friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Kuo & Tang, 2014; Ong et al., 2011; Utz, 2010) and interact with them frequently by writing private messages and public status updates (Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

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¹ social networking sites (SNSs).

Much research has been carried out on the relation between the personality trait narcissism and behaviour on SNSs. Narcissism as a personality trait reflects a high level of self-love, positive and inflated self-view, sense of entitlement, self-serving bias, as well as an exaggerated sense of self-importance and uniqueness (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). There is some theoretical and empirical evidence for the dual nature of narcissism (Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1991): grandiose or open narcissism is contrasted with vulnerable or covert narcissism.

Open narcissists have a high demand of attention, admiration and popularity. To get these, they present themselves as self-confident, extraverted and charming interaction partners. They initiate many superficial relations in a short time and use them to regulate their self-esteem and for self-enhancement in particular (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 2001; Twenge & Foster, 2008).

Covert narcissists are also persuaded of their peculiarity, importance and grandiosity. However, they feel inferior to others and express a fragile self-confidence. Their social interactions are often affected by the presence of self-doubt, sensibility, dissatisfaction and social anxiety (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Miller & Campbell, 2008).

In recent studies, open narcissism predicted a high level of social interaction (e.g., number of online-friends, status updates) and self-presentation (e.g., number of uploaded photos) on Facebook. Narcissistic users visit their Facebook page more frequently and spend more time there than other members (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Winter et al., 2014). On the German platform StudiVZ, users with high covert narcissism also showed a high level of online activity (Brailovskaia & Bierhoff, 2012). The explanation of these results rests on the assumption that covert and open narcissism show a common narcissism core. Both types of narcissists are persuaded of their grandiosity and uniqueness and have a demand for admiration (Rohmann et al., 2012). On Facebook covert narcissists get the chance to present their narcissism in an open manner, like open narcissists. However, offline they do not possess the social skills of the open narcissists to gain public approval.

Research of personality traits as predictors of online behaviour takes place mostly in English speaking countries (e.g., the USA) or Western Europe (e.g., Germany). Studies from other countries on this topic are rare. However, a recent study showed that in Singapore narcissism is also positively correlated with self-presentation on Facebook (e.g., status update frequency; Ong et al., 2011). This positive correlation was also observed on the Chinese platform Renren (Wang, Jackson, Zhang, & Su, 2012). We also looked for such studies in Eastern Europe (e.g., Russia). However, our search in international databases like PsycINFO showed no results.

To reduce this lack of cross-cultural research on the relationship between personality and online behaviour, the aim of the current study is to investigate cross-culturally the use of the platform Facebook and its relationship to the personality trait narcissism in Germany and Russia.

Why did we compare Russian and German Facebook users in particular?

Firstly, both countries diverge regarding their cultural, historical, social and geographical conditions which is no surprise given their independent cultural traditions which go back to the middle ages and beyond.

Culture represents a summary of shared attitudes, norms, values, procedures and assumptions within a community or society (Triandis & Suh, 2002). In general, culture is defined as shared life

style of a group of people (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011). Cultural similarities and differences are represented on cultural dimensions. Triandis (1995) emphasizes the cultural dimension of collectivism/individualism as especially relevant. In a collectivistic society attachment to the ingroup (e.g., the extended family) is favoured. The interdependence of group members is strongly emphasized. In contrast, in individualistic cultures personal independence, individual freedom, and individual peculiarity are emphasized. Family attachments are less important and are focused on the nuclear family.

Russia is a large country between Europe and Asia. The Russian culture includes collectivistic but also individualistic elements. From the study of Latova and Latov (2007) the conclusion is justified that Russian society represents an attenuated collectivistic culture which is positioned between Asian and Western countries. Depending on the region values and norms may differ considerably. While in smaller cities and villages the family plays an important role, in larger towns, especially in Moscow, the expression of one's peculiarity is significant (Stadelbauer, 2010). However, Russia as a whole has undergone significant political and economic changes since 1990 (e.g., Höhmann, 2004). In contrast, Germany represents a Western European country with a predominantly individualistic culture. Germany is deeply committed to its democratic tradition and technological excellence (e.g., Rödder, 2011).

Secondly, both countries seem to have the readiness to introduce new information technologies in common (e.g., Pokatzky, 2014). For example, many experts in information technology have a Russian or German background. Prominent information scientists include Georgy Adelson-Velsky, Andrey Kolmogorov, Leonid Levin, and Mark Semonovich Pinsker on the Russian side and Rudolf Ahlswede, Joachim Hagenauer, Peter Schirmbacher, and Konrad Zuse on the German side. In addition, Russians and Germans were in close contact across the centuries influencing each other (e.g., Horn, 2014). Therefore, in both cultures differences and similarities coexist and it is not at all clear from the beginning whether the differences or the similarities will characterize cross-cultural comparisons on the link between personality and online behaviour.

To our knowledge, this is the first cross-cultural study including Russia and Germany on the effect of narcissism on Facebook use. Furthermore, until now there is almost no research on open and covert narcissism and its relevance for online activities in Russia, although Russia is one of the important joint partner of the Internet.

According to earlier results, we assume a positive relation between open and covert narcissism in both Germany and Russia (hypothesis 1). Also in both countries we expect a positive relation between narcissism and level of self-presentation and amount of social interaction on Facebook (hypothesis 2). Furthermore, we expect to find no significant differences of narcissism and online behaviour on Facebook between Germany and Russia (hypothesis 3).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Flyer, which informed about our study and included the URL of the online questionnaire were distributed in several German Universities and placed online in groups of different SNSs (e.g., Facebook, VK). A sample of 122 German Facebook users (52 male, 70 female) with a mean age of 23.33 ($SD = 5.09$, range: 18–53) participated in the current study. The second sample consisted of 72 Russian Facebook users (35 male, 37 female) with a mean age of 25.18 ($SD = 5.81$, range: 18–51).

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