



# Homogeneity of personal values and personality traits in Facebook social networks



Jan-Erik Lönnqvist<sup>a,\*</sup>, Juha V.A. Itkonen<sup>b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, Finland

<sup>b</sup>Bank of Finland, Finland

<sup>c</sup>Department of Political and Economic Studies, University of Helsinki, Finland

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 March 2015

Revised 28 October 2015

Accepted 3 November 2015

Available online 5 November 2015

### Keywords:

Homogeneity

Homophily

Facebook

Big Five

Personal values

Similarity-attraction

## ABSTRACT

Focusing on similarity of personal values and of personality traits, we investigated who is friends with whom in Facebook friendships. A Facebook application administered questionnaires and retrieved data on whom in our sample of 3348 participants were friends. On average, participants had 8.7 friends within our sample. People similar to each other, either regarding personal values or personality traits, tended to be friends. Moreover, the effect of similarity was not evenly distributed across the value or trait continuums. Those scoring high on Openness to Change or Self-Transcendence values were more likely to be friends with people sharing these values. Regarding personality, those high in Emotional Stability or Openness to Experience, or low in Extraversion, tended to have similar friends.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Evidence on the effects of social networks on individuals' behavior has rapidly accumulated during the last decades. For instance, social networks have been shown to predict behaviors or behavioral outcomes as diverse as fertility rates (Balbo & Barban, 2014), the use of contraception (Kohler, 1997), educational attainment (Mare, 1991), migration (Massey, 1988), health behavior (Valente, Hoffman, Ritt-Olson, Lichtman, & Johnson, 2003), and infectious disease transmission (Morris & Kretzschmar, 1997). There is also evidence for the reverse causal path: attributes and behaviors affect the selection of network partners – people tend to select similar other as friends (Hallinan & Williams, 1989), spouses (Mare, 1991), and sexual partners (Morris, 1991). Both of these processes (social networks influence behavior, and individuals select similar others as network partners) cause homogeneity in social networks – similar people are more likely to be connected as compared to dissimilar people. In their review on homogeneity, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) concluded that race and ethnicity create the strongest divides in our personal environments, with age, religion, education, occupation, and gender following in roughly that order.

Despite the impressive evidence on the homogeneity of many fundamental characteristics, empirical evidence on the homogeneity of some of the most central individual variables that personality psychologists have identified – personal values and personality traits – is either lacking or extremely scarce. One reason for this could be an excessive focus on homophily – a preference for those who are similar or “love of the same” – often referred to within psychology as the similarity-attraction paradigm, theory, or effect (e.g., Byrne, 1971). In the introductory sections that follow, we first argue that personal values and personality traits could be expected to reveal homogeneity even in the absence of homophily. More specific support for such expectations can be derived from recent work on ideological bubbles – building on the notion that both values and traits underlie ideological or political worldviews, we argue that research on the ideological bubbles in which people live is particularly suggestive of the existence of homogeneity based also on values and traits. We then introduce a particular model of personal values and a particular model of personality traits. Finally, we summarize the purpose of the present research and explain our statistical methods, in conjunction with which we introduce our secondary goal – to investigate whether homogeneity is stronger at either pole of the value or trait dimensions. The research is set in the online environment afforded by the social media site Facebook.

\* Corresponding author at: Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, PO Box 16, 00014 Helsinki, Finland.

E-mail address: [jan-erik.lonnqvist@helsinki.fi](mailto:jan-erik.lonnqvist@helsinki.fi) (J.-E. Lönnqvist).

### 1.1. Homogeneity without homophily

Psychologists have, in research on similarity, typically focused on homophily – on whether those who are similar are attracted to each other. Initially, both experimental research (e.g., Byrne, 1971) and studies carried out on actual friendship dyads (Kandel, 1978; Newcomb, 1961) suggested that similarity regarding characteristics such as attitudes, values, and beliefs is related to attraction. However, a recent meta-analysis (Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008) based on 313 field and laboratory studies revealed that similarity of attitudes and traits may breed attraction only when there is no other interaction between the participants – even briefly interacting with the target of the attractiveness ratings strongly diminishes the effect of similarity. Most pertinent to the present research, the meta-analysis revealed that similarity is not associated with attraction in existing relationships. Consistent with these results, a recent study employing large, nationally representative samples from three Western countries showed that personality similarity among married couples is unrelated to both life and relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010). Together these results suggest that the effects of similarity on both attraction and satisfaction are negligible in existing relationships.

The above described kind of research, focusing on situations in which two people with varying degrees of similarity interact, and assessing the extent to which similarity increases the likelihood of a social bond emerging (i.e., asking to what extent the two people are attracted to each other), may, we believe, have excluded many of the processes by which characteristics such as values, traits, and attitudes may, in real life, influence social interaction. Most importantly, these characteristics may strongly influence the likelihood that two persons will ever interact with each other. There are also other mechanisms than homophily that may cause homogeneity. One such mechanism is propinquity, which refers to the phenomenon in which different people select (or drift towards) similar lives (Wimmer & Lewis, 2010).

Both personal values and personality traits are known to predict a plethora of important life outcomes (for a review, see Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). For instance, values and/or traits predict social class (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999), migration patterns (Jokela, Elovainio, Kivimäki, & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2008), education level (Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Lipsanen, & Helkama, 2009), and relationship status (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). Such life outcomes, all of which show substantial homogeneity (for a review, see McPherson et al., 2001), expose individuals to some potential acquaintances, while effectively excluding many others. To illustrate, in London (UK), trait Openness to Experience is associated with living in neighborhoods with lower income and employment rate, lower voting activity, higher crime rates, and a higher proportion of people receiving income and disability support (Jokela, Bleidorn, Lamb, Gosling, & Rentfrow, 2015; for more evidence regarding the geographical clustering of personality traits, see Jokela, 2009; Jokela et al., 2008; Rentfrow, 2010; Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). Considering the paramount importance of physical proximity for friendship formation (e.g., Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), people with similar levels of Openness to Experience – that is, people more likely to be living in the same neighborhood – would be expected to befriend each other more often than those with different levels of Openness to Experience.

Based on the above, we argue that by focusing only or primarily on homophily, psychological research has underestimated the role of values and traits in social relationships. Real life social networks may be much more strongly influenced by values and traits than what is suggested by research focusing only on homophily – people with similar values or traits need not prefer each other as friends for homogeneity to emerge, all that need to happen is that

they be more exposed to each other. The aim of the present research, contrary to the aims of the overwhelming amount of previous psychological research on the influence of similarity on social relationships, is not to investigate homophily, but instead focus on the influence of values and traits on the formation of real life social networks. Although there is little evidence of homophily regarding personal values or personality traits (Montoya et al., 2008), this in no way excludes the possibility of homogeneity based on propinquity. Note that we do not, in the present research claim to be able to differentiate homogeneity based on homophily from homogeneity based on propinquity. More modestly, we claim that much of the previous research on this topic has focused on homophily, and that this may have underestimated the extent to which people in real life relationships are similar to each other. Therefore, we believe that our focus on homogeneity, be it caused by homophily, propinquity, or some other mechanisms, may, even in the absence of an account of the underlying processes (homophily vs. propinquity), contribute to our knowledge of real life social networks.

### 1.2. Ideological bubbles

From the perspective of both personal values and personality traits, research on homogeneity based on political or ideological worldviews could be particularly pertinent. In the 2015 parliamentary elections in Finland, the populist right-wing political party the Finns Party became – much to the dismay of the social and cultural elite – the parliament's second largest party. The election results along with the heated debate that followed led to a widespread concern that the previous uniformity thought to characterize Finnish culture had been replaced by politically, ideologically, and culturally segregated bubbles from within which it was difficult to understand the perspectives of those living in other bubbles (e.g., Hamilo, 2015). Recent empirical research employing the conservative vs. liberal dimension has indeed confirmed that people with similar ideologies tend to cluster together. The conservative vs. liberal conflict concerns two key issue domains (e.g., Ashton et al., 2005; Benoit & Laver, 2006). One is the sociocultural domain, with conservatives in favor of enforcing traditional social norms and liberals promoting progressive social policies. The other is the economic domain, with conservatives supporting free markets and low levels of redistributive social welfare and liberals supporting relatively strong redistributive and regulatory economic intervention.

Clustering in terms of the conservative vs. liberal dimension has been observed both offline and online. Offline, this phenomenon has, e.g., been observed in geographical clustering – liberals who live in conservative areas tend to migrate to more liberal areas (and vice versa for conservatives living in liberal areas; Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014). Online, ideological clustering has been observed for instance on the social media site Facebook, where those identifying themselves as liberals (conservatives) tend to be friends with others identifying themselves as liberals (conservatives; Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). Importantly from the perspective of the present research, there are substantial differences in the personal values and personality traits of liberals and conservatives (for a review see e.g., Jost, 2006), suggesting that also these characteristics could be expected to show evidence of homogeneity.

### 1.3. Homogeneity of personal values

We conceptualized personal values within the framework provided by Schwartz's (1992) values theory. According to Schwartz (1992), personal values are transsituational goals that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person. They act as standards of what is most desirable when evaluating events, behaviors, and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/951242>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/951242>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)