The Origins and Development of a Typology of Facebook Users

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Abstract
This paper provides background information on the development of a typology of Facebook users and the formation and activities of a Facebook research group.

Keywords: Facebook, Facebook Research, Facebook Typology.

Introduction:

It is estimated that more than one billion people worldwide use Facebook (2). A recent comprehensive review reveals that over 400 published studies have investigated a range of variables associated with Facebook use (5). Given that context, I want to summarize some of the steps which lead to the development of a framework and typology to examine Facebook behavior.

I opened a Facebook account in December of 2010. Six months later I was posting and interacting with more than 120 "Facebook friends." Realizing I had a sample of over 100 people who revealed certain consistent patterns in their postings and responses, I decided to check empirically on my observations and hypotheses. In early fall of 2011 I organized a small research group consisting of volunteer students from my classes. My colleague, Christopher Warren expressed an interest in the topic and also joined the research group which consisted of between eight and ten undergraduates, two graduate students, all with many friends, and myself, a relative newcomer.

I initially proposed to the group a seven fold typology of Facebook (FB) users which I named and defined as follows:

The Entrepreneur: Uses FB primarily for business and/or professional posts—information on workshops, books, meetings, etc.

Look at me: Uses FB to post information and photos about the Individual's current life events.

The Ideologue: Uses FB primarily for political and societal posts.

The Spy: Uses FB to examine the behavior and posts of friends and others.

The Historian: Uses FB to post archival and current photos of family and friends.

Social Butterfly: Uses FB to comment on the postings of others.

In Name Only: Has a FB account but rarely, if ever, uses it.

The group responded positively to the proposed typology. Various suggestions were immediately incorporated: "In Name only" was dropped; "The Ideologue" was renamed "The Activist"; "The Spy" was renamed "The Observer"; "The Historian" was renamed "The Scrap Booker"; "Look at Me" was incorporated and subsumed under "The Social Butterfly."
The FB research group then developed and refined a form to code FB user profiles as well as posts and activities (4). Profile information included available demographic material and other information such as number of friends. Posts were evaluated and placed in one of the five categories (Observer, Scrap Booker, Social Butterfly, Activist or Entrepreneur.)   After a number of practice sessions, FB research group members were asked to code 30-50 individuals randomly from their personal list of FB friends. University IRB approval was obtained for this research approach and over 350 FB user profiles and activities were coded.
The next steps in the research process were coordinated by Emma Vaughn, a graduate student in CSULB's Psychology Master's program.   Ms. Vaughn's thesis, focused primarily on investigating inter-rater reliability.   Reliability was found to be quite high in terms of internal consistency and agreement among raters. A report of this research is currently being prepared for publication.

Others in The FB research group have examined variables related to gender, sexuality and impression management (1) , FB birthday greetings as a function of gender and relationship status (3), and changes on FB typology behavior over time (4).

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