Why Do Young Adults Develop a Passion for Internet Activities? The Associations among Personality, Revealing “True Self” on the Internet, and Passion for the Internet

Leman Pinar Tosun, M.A. and Timo Lajunen, Ph.D.

Abstract

This study examines the associations of harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP) for Internet activities with Eysenckian personality dimensions in a sample of 421 university students. Results show that psychoticism correlates positively with both HP and OP; extroversion correlates positively with HP only; and neuroticism has no correlation with passion for Internet activities. Additionally, the study examines participants’ tendency to express their “true self” on the Internet, and the results reveal that this tendency has a positive association with psychoticism, neuroticism, and both types of passion for the Internet. Moreover, the relationship between psychoticism and passion (both harmonious and obsessive) is mediated by the tendency to express true self on the Internet. The results were interpreted from the media dependency perspective.

Introduction

Internet communication eases individuals’ daily lives by offering a wide range of social connections, stimulating interpersonal contact, and rapid and easy access to entertainment, information, and shopping services. Because of the many positive features of Internet communication, Internet users may devote a substantial amount of time in their daily routine to Internet activities they find interesting and important, and they can become passionately involved in those activities. The current study explores young adults’ passion for Internet activities with a focus on the variations in their personality characteristics and in their degree of inclination to disclose their “true self” or inner identity on the Internet.

The first aim of the study is to examine how personality characteristics of individuals, which are classified under three basic dimensions (extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism), are associated with the degree of passion they felt for their Internet activities. Second, it examines whether developing passion for the Internet is more likely for people who tend to reveal their “true” aspects on the Internet. Finally, the study offers the tendency for revealing one’s true self on the Internet as the underlying explanation for the association between personality dimensions and passion for the Internet.

Previous research differentiates between two types of passion for activities: harmonious and obsessive. Seguin-Levesque et al. define harmonious passion for the Internet (HP) as people’s ability to successfully integrate Internet activities with other relevant activities in their life, whereas they define obsessive passion for the Internet (OP) as a person’s difficulty in incorporating Internet activities with other life activities. In a previous study, the association of passion for the Internet with people’s real-life relationships was examined. It was found that an OP was positively associated with relationship conflict and negatively with dyadic adjustment, whereas HP was negatively associated with relationship conflict and positively with dyadic adjustment. The same study also indicated that the higher the individuals’ level of OP, the more likely that they report having extrinsic motivation for their relationship (i.e., instrumental reasons for being together), whereas the higher their HP, the more likely that they report having intrinsic motivation (i.e., sole pleasure for being together) for the relationship. There are also studies showing the associations of passion for the Internet with behaviors in some other domains of life: both OP and HP are related to online shopping dependency, and OP (but not HP) may lead to online-game addiction.

The study findings described here suggest that passion toward the Internet may have important consequences on well-being. For promoting healthy Internet use, it is therefore essential to know the factors that contribute to the development of OP and HP. Personality traits are potential predictors of passion for Internet use. So far, only one study has focused on the relationship between personality characteristics and...
passion for the Internet activities. Wang and Yang\(^3\) examined how extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were linked to passion for the Internet; they illustrated that people with high HP are more agreeable and more conscientious than people with low HP. To our knowledge, the relationships between the Eysenckian personality dimensions—extroversion, neuroticism and psychoticism—and passion for the Internet have not been studied before. The present study attempts to demonstrate this link.

Previous research has provided some evidence that the types of Internet activities in which people engage vary with people's degree of psychoticism, extroversion, and neuroticism. In a study by Hamburger and Ben-Artzi,\(^5\) extroversion was found to be positively related to the use of leisure activities for men and negatively related to the use of social services among women. In a study by Amiel and Sargent,\(^6\) extroversion was negatively related to Internet use for social-communal purposes such as "belongingness to a group" and "feeling more comfortable talking to people online." According to the results of Moldanado et al.,\(^7\) introverts sent as many messages to an e-discussion group as extroverts did, and introverts' messages contained more information than extroverts' messages did. All these results suggest that Internet does not serve similar functions for extroverts and introverts. While Internet is nothing more than a tool of activity planning and spending spare time for extroverts, for introverts, it is a tool for providing social and emotional contacts, whereas neurotic introverts prefer Internet communication anxiety in face-to-face environments. The Internet environment is less anxiety-arousing due to such characteristics as the lack of social cues and the possibility to choose the time for sending and receiving messages.

It was found that people scoring high on psychoticism have an interest in sophisticated and deviant use of Internet.\(^6\) Psychoticism involves attributes like being solitary, being insensitive to others, aggressiveness, and disregard for social conventions. When those characteristics are considered, it is not surprising that psychotics tend to use Internet pornography more than people scoring low on psychoticism.

It is important to remember that Eysenckian dimensions are not psychopathological diagnostic criteria but rather personality characteristics varying in the degree of normality. High score in neuroticism does not mean that a person is a neurotic; high score in psychoticism does not mean that a person is a psychotic in the clinical sense. Moreover, three Eysenckian personality dimensions should be thought of as continuums rather than categories. For example, being a "neurotic" in Eysenck's terms just means "high score in personality dimension labeled as neuroticism compared to normative sample," not belonging to a diagnostic category.

While previous studies provided some information about relationships between Eysenck's personality dimensions and purposes of Internet use, the present study investigates how those dimensions are related to the degree of passion toward the Internet. Specifically, extroversion is expected to have a positive association with HP but not with OP. Psychoticism, however, is expected to be positively associated with both HP and OP. Those expectations are based on media dependency theory.\(^11\) According to this theory, people actively search for communication media that satisfy their needs (e.g., relaxation, information gathering, and social needs), and they may develop dependency on a communication medium that satisfies their needs. In this way, passion for the Internet can be assumed to be linked to Internet dependency. If people feel that certain communication needs are best satisfied through the Internet, we can suppose that they are likely to develop a passion and dependency on the Internet. People who cannot satisfy their various needs through face-to-face contact may actively seek other media, such as the Internet, for satisfying these needs and consequently develop a passion, which may be in an extreme case turn into an obsession. On the other hand, people who can satisfy their needs through face-to-face contact and who need other communication media only for some specific purposes can be expected to develop HP but not OP for the Internet. Psychotics and neurotics are likely to have some difficulties in their offline social interactions. For instance, it has been reported that many people scoring high on psychoticism tend to get engaged in antisocial behaviors that are likely to alienate them from others, reduce their social circle, and make their social life less rewarding,\(^12\) whereas the "neurotic introverts" experience communication apprehension.\(^13\) Because online activities have a potential to gratify neurotics' and psychotics' social needs not met in the offline world, they may be expected to develop OP for their Internet activities. Extroverts, on the other hand, tend to have a satisfying social life in the offline world and thus are less likely to use online services for social interaction. In the present study, extroverts are expected to use the Internet in harmony with their offline activities.

Internet users' passion for their Internet activities might depend on the degree to which the Internet allows them to express their real identity. Some aspects of Internet communication, such as relative anonymity and absence of physical presence of the other person, may help people to express those "real" aspects of their self.\(^15\) Previous research shows that the Internet enables people to reveal some aspects of their identity even though they keep those aspects hidden during their face-to-face communication because of the fear of societal disapproval. For instance, McKenna and Bargh\(^15\) demonstrated that people with marginalized identities (e.g., homosexuals, people with marginalized ideological beliefs) may use the Internet for self-expression.

A previous study shows a link between the tendency of expressing one's true self on the Internet and Eysenck's
than females, Internet use. The male participants were found to be older examined on participants’ age and years of experience with Internet for 6 years. Eighteen participants (75%) reported that they use the Internet every day. On the average, participants had been using the Internet. According to media dependency theory, the true self on the Internet is positively related to passion for the Internet. The tendency to reveal one’s true self on the Internet may have a mediator role in understanding how general personality traits are related to passion for the Internet. The current study proposes that the activation of true self on the Internet may have a mediator role in understanding how general personality traits are related to passion for the Internet. The tendency to reveal one’s true self on the Internet is expected to increase with (a) an increase in psychoticism, (b) an increase in neuroticism, and (c) a decrease in extroversion. We also expected the extent that individuals reveal their true selves on the Internet to be related to the degree of the passion for the Internet.

Method
Participants

Participants were 421 university students (278 females, 143 males) ages 17 to 30 (M = 21.73, SD = 2.23). Three hundred eighteen participants (75%) reported that they use the Internet every day. On the average, participants had been using Internet for 6 years (SD = 2.75). The gender differences were examined on participants’ age and years of experience with Internet use. The male participants were found to be older than females, t(419) = -0.25, p < 0.00; and they were more experienced than females with Internet use, t(419) = -2.98, p < 0.01. Gender differences reported in the length of and experience with Internet use was consistent with the findings of previous literature. The descriptive statistics of study variables for male and female participants and for the whole sample are given in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Internet experience (years)</th>
<th>“Real me” score</th>
<th>Passion for Internet activities</th>
<th>Personality variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17–30</td>
<td>0.5–13</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>1–5.00</td>
<td>0–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
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<td>21.73a</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>5.68a</td>
<td>2.39</td>
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<td>2.63</td>
<td>6.45b</td>
<td>2.70</td>
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<td>1.76</td>
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<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Females, Males, and Total Sample**

Note: In each row, the means with different subscripts are significantly different.

Table 1 includes the means, standard deviations, and the number of participants for each variable. The table shows that there are significant differences between males and females in terms of age, Internet experience, “Real me” score, and passion for Internet activities. The personality variables, including extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism, also show significant differences between males and females.

**Measures**

**Passion scale.** The passion scale was developed originally by Vallerand et al. to assess two types of passion (OP and HP) toward interesting and involving activities. Two Turkish speakers with good command of English language translated the passion scale to Turkish, and their translation was checked by using back-translation. The wording of some items was slightly changed to fit the purpose of the study. The passion scale included 14 items (6 items for OP, 8 items for HP). Participants had to evaluate the appropriateness of each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1, not at all, 5, completely. A factor analysis (principal axis factoring as method) was conducted with direct oblimin rotation. Results yielded two factors corresponding to the two hypothesized subscales. However, one item from the OP subscale was deleted because its factor loading was lower than 0.30. The internal consistencies of both OP and HP subscales were adequate (β = 0.92 and 0.77 respectively). Correlation coefficient between the two factors was 0.63. The items of each subscale and their factor loadings are shown in Table 2.

**“Real-Me” questionnaire.** The Real-Me questionnaire developed by Amichai-Hamburger et al. includes four questions focusing on the ease with which participants revealed their inner world to their friends through the Internet rather than through face-to-face contact. While the response scale originally was based on two yes-or-no items and two 7-point scale items, the response scale of all items was changed in the present study to a 5-point scale ranging from 1, does not agree at all, to 5, agrees completely. Higher scores imply higher levels of revealing oneself on the Internet. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the Real-Me questionnaire was 0.87.

**Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R).** EPQ-R is a questionnaire with 100 yes-or-no questions. It consists of four subscales: Extroversion (23 items), Neuroticism (24 items), Psychoticism (32 items), and Lie scale (21 items). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism were acceptable (0.79, 0.81, and 0.72 respectively).

Demographics and information about Internet usage patterns. Participants were asked to state how frequently...
they use the Internet, how many years they had been using the Internet, and their age and gender.

Results

First, the correlations among personality variables, HP and OP, and the Real-Me score were examined. Table 3 shows that the Real-Me score had significant positive correlations with both HP and OP ($r = 0.64, p < 0.001$, and $r = 0.61, p < 0.001$ respectively). HP had significant positive correlations with psychoticism ($r = 0.20, p < 0.001$) and extroversion ($r = 0.13, p < 0.01$); OP had significant positive correlations with psychoticism only ($r = 0.13, p < 0.01$); and the Real-Me score had significant positive correlations with psychoticism ($r = 0.27, p < 0.001$) and neuroticism ($r = 0.15, p < 0.01$).

Second, mediation models were tested by using regression analysis as suggested by Barron and Kenny. Six different mediation analyses were conducted for the following mediation hypotheses: the “real me” on the Internet would mediate the relationship between HP and each of those three personality dimensions. According to the mediator analyses, neuroticism was found to be associated with neither OP nor HP. Extroversion was not related to the “real me” on the Internet score. Thus, mediation hypotheses involving neuroticism and extroversion were not supported.

Table 4 shows the mediation analysis results for psychoticism. Two sets of analyses were conducted: one for testing the psychoticism–“real me”–OP link, the other for testing psychoticism–“real me”–HP link. First, OP/HP scores were regressed on psychoticism (step 1). The unstandardized regression coefficient associated with the effect of psychoticism on OP/HP was significant ($B = 0.05, p < 0.001$ for OP; $B = 0.03, p < 0.01$ for HP). Thus, the requirement for mediation in step 1 was met. The “real me” on the Internet score was regressed on psychoticism in order to establish that the predictor was related to the hypothesized mediator (step 2). The unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.06$) associated with this relation also was significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, and thus the condition for step 2 was met. Finally, OP/HP score was simultaneously regressed on the “real me” on the Internet score and psychoticism (step 3). The coefficient associated with the relation of the “real me” on the Internet with OP/HP (controlling for psychoticism) was significant ($B = 0.69, p < 0.001$ for OP; $B = 0.62, p < 0.001$ for HP). Thus, the condition for Step 3 was met. The final regression equations also showed the relation of psychoticism with OP/HP, controlling for the “real me” on the Internet. The coefficient was significant for neither OP nor HP.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that personality dimensions influence the extent to which individuals use the Internet.
culty fitting in, 9 may be more willing to express themselves
hand, psychotics, who are often troublesome and have diffi-
express themselves in Internet environments. On the other
may experience anxiety about revealing their thoughts and
themselves. Neurotics, characterized by shyness and anxiety,
with difficulty in face-to-face interactions to better express
self on the Internet with psychoticism
ternet mediates the relationship between psychoticism
inclination for expressing one’s true self on the Internet.

Additionally, the inclination for expressing one’s true self on
the Internet was related to both HP and OP. Extroverts are
able to establish satisfactory social life through the
face-to-face contacts and thus get engaged in Internet
activities only to the extent that those activities support
their already established social life. Psychotics, however, are
likely to suffer from socialization problem in their real-life envi-
ronments9 and therefore may perceive the offline world as a
substitute for real life. Specific activities regarding Internet
use (e.g., looking for a new social circle, communicating with
previously known friends and relatives) should also be taken
into account to gain more insight about why and how people
develop passion for Internet activities.

A very interesting finding is that the relationship between
psychoticism and OP and HP were both mediated by the
“real me” on the Internet. It shows us that people with high
levels of psychoticism use the Internet for expressing their
inner aspects, and as they continue to use it for such a pur-
pose, they develop an OP for Internet use. The authors as-
sumed that the initial motivation for people with high levels
of psychoticism to use the Internet for expressing their
inner aspects is the difficulties they have in face-to-face contact. 
Unfortunately, the study questionnaire did not include
questions about participants’ perceived difficulties in face-
to-face contacts, an area that should be explored in future
studies.

The current study supports earlier research showing that
individuals’ Internet use reflects their personality. While
earlier research has demonstrated the associations of per-
sonality with the types of Internet activities, the current study
demonstrated that personality is also related to the degree of
passion felt for Internet activities. In addition, the current
study demonstrated the importance of an Internet-specific variable—“real me” on the Internet—in the link between
psychoticism and passion for the Internet.

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translation of the tests, and Zumrut Yıldırım and Bilge Yal-
cindag for their help in data entry.

Disclosure Statement

No competing financial interests exist.

**Table 4. Testing the Mediating Effect of “Real Me” on the Internet in Psychoticism-OP Relationship and in Psychoticism-HP Relationship**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Testing steps in meditational model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome 1: Obsessive passion</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
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<td>Outcome 1: Obsessive passion</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.
References


Address correspondence to:
Leman Pinar Tosun
Department of Psychology
Middle East Technical University
06531 Ankara
Turkey

E-mail: tpinar@metu.edu.tr