

Facebook profiles capture true personality, according to new psychology research

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Online social networks such as Facebook are being used to express and communicate real personality, instead of an idealized virtual identity, according to new research from psychologist Sam Gosling at The University of Texas at Austin.

"I was surprised by the findings because the widely held assumption is that [people](#) are using their profiles to promote an enhanced impression of themselves," says Gosling of the more than 700 million people worldwide who have online profiles. "In fact, our findings suggest that online [social networking](#) profiles convey rather accurate images of the profile owners, either because people aren't trying to look good or because they are trying and failing to pull it off.

"These findings suggest that online social networks are not so much about providing positive spin for the profile owners," he adds, "but are instead just another medium for engaging in genuine social interactions, much like the telephone."

Gosling and a team of researchers collected 236 profiles of college-aged people from the United States ([Facebook](#)) and Germany (StudiVZ, SchuelerVZ). The researchers used [questionnaires](#) to assess the profile owners' actual personality characteristics as well as their ideal-personality traits (how they wished to be). The [personality traits](#) included: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness.

In the study, observers rated the profiles of people they did not know. These ratings were then compared to the profile owners' actual personality and their ideal-personality. Personality impressions based on online social network profiles were accurate and were not affected by profile owners' self-idealization.

Accuracy was strongest for extraversion — paralleling results of face-to-face encounters — and lowest for neuroticism. Those findings were consistent with previous research showing that neuroticism is difficult to detect without being in person.

"I think that being able to express personality accurately contributes to the popularity of online social networks in two ways," says Gosling.

"First, it allows profile owners to let others know who they are and, in doing so, satisfies a basic need to be known by others. Second, it means that profile viewers feel they can trust the information they glean from online social network profiles, building their confidence in the system as a whole."

Gosling recently co-authored a study on how first impressions do matter when it comes to communicating personality through appearance. For his latest personality research, he focuses his attention to personality in relation to online social networks.

More information: Findings will be published in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science*.

Source: University of Texas at Austin ([news](#) : [web](#))

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