

ABSTRACT

An individual's behavior and choices on the Internet are directed by individual characteristics and, therefore, understanding behavior on the Internet must include an examination of the role of personality traits of Internet users. In this study, the freely available 16IPIP personality instrument was used for the purpose of measuring personality traits as part of the objective of determining the factors which are important determinants of an individual's behavior in using online information services to forward online content to others.

Based on previous studies, a theoretical model was formulated, tested and developed to arrive at a final model using data collected by questionnaire from a sample of 386 individuals. The results identified important causal effects on forwarding online content behavior and significant correlations among the variables in the model. For causal effects the number of hours per week that an individual spends using online information services to pull information content or messages, an individual's age, an individual's measure on the orderliness personality trait, and the number of months that an individual has been using online information services were found to be the four significant determinants of forwarding online content behavior.

Significant causal effects do not necessarily correspond with significant correlations and vice versa. Therefore, in order to fully investigate the roles of the model variables especially personality traits it was necessary to also examine significant correlations among the model variables:

(a) Considering significant correlations associated with the important causal effects on forwarding online content behavior it was found that individuals who are most (least) likely to forward online content are older (younger), have extensive (little) experience in using online information services, and spend many (few) hours per week using online information services to pull information content or messages. Older (younger) individuals are more (less) likely to be perfectionists seeking order and exactness; Individuals with extensive (little) experience in using online information

services spend many (few) hours each week using online information services to pull information content or messages. Moreover, all of these significant correlations were also found to be significant for both males and females separately.

(b) Correlations between each of the four important determinants of forwarding online content (Age, Orderliness, experience in using online information services, and hours per week using online information services to pull information content or messages), the individual's level of education, and the other 15 personality traits revealed numerous significant correlations involving personality traits as well as similarities and differences between males and females.

Overall, personality traits were not found to be important causes for forwarding online content behavior but instead they were found to be significantly correlated with this behavior and the variables which were found to be significant causes. In addition, significant correlations involving personality traits revealed important similarities and differences between males and females.

From a practical perspective, it is suggested that practitioners such as psychological practitioners, marketers, and IT professionals who are concerned with increasing the spread of information in online environments and the design and development of online content and the functionality of supporting technologies should pay attention to individuals who spend considerable amounts of time pulling information, are older, are orderly, and are heavy users of online information services. In addition, the structure of the information sites should be easy to access, with friendly interfaces, and logical navigation with the online content available for users at popular sites. Also, the sites should provide reliable, informative, valid, objective, interesting, non-trivial content (i.e. addressing serious topics), and relate to current situations.