Chapter 16
Comparing Online Personality of Americans and Chinese

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ABSTRACT

Internet is a newly invented product in recent tens of years and has a profound effect on personality. Here come the new concept-Online personality-in recent studies. In this review, we want to find what are the similarities and differences of online personality studies in China and USA, two representative countries of eastern and western cultures. Firstly, 349 articles were selected and divided into three main areas, such as online personality measurement, online personality and its related Internet behavior, online personality and problematic Internet usage respectively, to address the question. Second, the potential reasons of these similarities and differences are discussed and finally future research directions are proposed that more direct online personality measurement should be developed and culture differences should be taken into consideration while doing research of online personality in different countries.

INTRODUCTION

Personality is one of the most intriguing and ancient topics in psychology. People have been exploring personality even before scientific psychology emerged. The earliest scientific psychological research in personality field can be traced back to Cooper and Anthony's study in 1699, and this topic remains prosperous in psychology ever since. Internet is a newly invented product in recent tens of years, which has a profound influence on people's personality. This attracts an increasing number of researchers to start online personality studies. As we can see in daily life, people can sometimes show some quite different personalities/traits online from their offline personalities in real life. However, there is still no clear definition or standard of online personality. Thus it is essential to systematically review studies in this field so that we can have a clearer understanding of online personality. Here we define the online personality as stable traits or pattern reflecting one's minds, emotions and behaviors under Internet circumstance.

In this review, we focus on the online personality in China and USA, which are two of the most typical countries representing eastern and western cultures respectively, trying to answer two questions: (1) what are the similarities of online personalities between USA and China? And (2) how they differ from each other? To better answer these questions, we first divided the researches concerning online personality in the two countries into the following three aspects: online personality measurements, online personality and its related Internet behavior, and online personality and problematic Internet usage. Then we analyzed the potential reasons underlying the similarities and differences of Chinese and American online personalities. Finally we outlined some future directions in the area of online personality study.

METHOD

We first searched all existing literature about online personality by multiple strategies including database search, manual search of references of identified papers, and consultation with experts. Six databases were used: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycTEST, PubMed, and CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). A set of keywords to fire up literature search were used, including "personality", "internet personality", "net personality", "cyber personality", "web personality", "website personality", and "online personality". Second, we narrowed down the topic to studies only investigating Chinese or American's online personality by checking the nationality of the participants in each paper. In the end, we got 147 American and 202 Chinese online personality articles respectively.

ONLINE PERSONALITY MEASUREMENTS

American Studies

Most studies of measuring online personality were to detect the traits correlated with Internet usage, however, these traits were usually tested by traditional offline personality tests such as Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), Big Five, Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire(16 PF). For instance, Landers and Lounsbury (2006) surveyed 117 undergraduates with the Adolescent Personal Style Inventory (APSI) which measured the Big Five personality traits offline and found that total Internet usage was negatively related to three Big-Five traits such as Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion and two other specific traits like Optimism and Work Drive. The total Internet usage was also positively related to Tough-Mindedness.

There were also other ways to measure online personality: (1) Using others-report questionnaire. Vazire (2006) utilized informant reports ("ratings of the targets by well-acquainted others, such as friends, spouses, or co-workers") to overcome the limitation of self-report in personality measurement and to be more cost-effective. (2) Creating online personality questionnaires. Buchanan, Johnson and Goldberg (2009) made a short five-factor personality inventory from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) as an online questionnaire to explore online personality. But the personality theory underneath the online questionnaire was still the same with traditional offline personality theory. (3) Summarizing personality from big data online (Goel, Hofman, & Sirer, 2012; Kern et al., 2014). For example, through feature extraction, correlation analysis, and visualization of 69,792 posts of Facebook users, Kern and his colleague (2014) found that the words and phrases used in the posts were associated with users' personality.

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