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DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND STRESS LEVELS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND NON-SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ONLINE

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DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND STRESS

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AND NON-SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ONLINE

by

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ABSTRACT

DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND STRESS

LEVELS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

AND NON-SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ONLINE

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As social media platforms are growing and becoming more popular on a global scale, social media influencers (SMIs) are targeted for reaching audiences for product promotion. The current study evaluated whether personality characteristics and stress differ across SMIs and non-SMIs. It was hypothesized that SMIs would have higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism than non-SMIs. It was also hypothesized that SMIs would demonstrate more stress on social media than non-SMIs. In the current study, the participants consisted of 75 SMIs and 75 non-SMIs on Instagram. LIWC software was used to analyze frequencies of terms used by the users to determine the levels of each characteristic. The results showed that SMIs had significantly higher levels of conscientiousness; however significant differences in stress, openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion did not emerge. These findings suggest that

further research should evaluate differences in levels of conscientiousness in SMIs as they differ from non-SMIs in this aspect. As companies utilize SMIs for product promotion, it is important to consider professional programs or models that cater to traits of conscientiousness.

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INTRODUCTION

<u>1.1 An Introduction to Social Media Influencers</u>

As social media platforms are growing and becoming more popular on a global scale, social media influencers (SMI) are targeted for reaching audiences in more effective ways. SMI is the title for an independent endorser who promotes products or brands on a social media platform (Smith et al., 2018). SMIs incorporate promoting products into their social media presence by sharing a review of the product and encouraging their followers to use the product as well. The work responsibilities for an SMI include communication with companies, being responsible for promoting products, and maintaining interaction with their followers.

1.1.1 Purpose

To alleviate or prevent stress and negative affect in the social media career, a further analysis of the characteristics related to SMI emergence in needed. Thus, the purpose of this paper will be to evaluate whether personality characteristics and stress differ across SMIs and non-SMIs. It is important to evaluate the differences between SMIs and non-SMIs for employers to be able to develop the necessary tools to collaborate with SMIs effectively.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Characteristics of an SMI

SMIs generally have many followers (Smith et al., 2018), and companies often reach out to SMIs to promote their service or product due to their large audience and presence on the platform (Hu et al., 2019). SMIs are becoming a popular marketing tool for companies, and it is important for the SMI to have a prominent social media presence to be considered an effective and successful SMI. The relationship between companies and an SMI is indicative of the personality traits of the SMI, as the characteristics for preferred collaborations for social media are specific to social media platforms and traits of the Big Five model (Smith et al., 2018). An SMI should have characteristics that enhance their engagement and presence on social media with their followers. As brands no longer solely rely on traditional marketing strategies such as commercial campaigns or ads in newspapers, SMIs are in high demand for companies to utilize for product advertisements (Smith, et al., 2018). Social media allows for a larger scale audience to be reached, and social media is becoming more efficient for marketing purposes, as the accessibility to a larger audience may enhance the success of a product or service.

2.2 Personality and SMI Emergence

As the world of social media is becoming more accessible, SMIs are increasingly emerging into the important roles of online marketing. It is important to examine the factors that help determine who would step into a position of an SMI. According to Smith et al.

(2018), to get a better understanding of how people become SMIs, researchers evaluate leader emergence qualities and create models that may be able to predict those qualities in potential SMIs. A model to consider when analyzing emergence in SMIs is the Big Five model, a model to identify a set of characteristics that captures personality traits on a continuum to better assess an individual's aptitude for a career. Research has demonstrated that dispositional characteristics can predict leader emergence (Delbaere et al., 2020). Researchers have found that the number of followers and frequency of posts is indicative of the quality and consistency of their communications with followers. The consistency of communication may be related to extraversion and agreeableness, which may be important to consider in future research (Badura et al., 2017).

An important aspect of leader emergence is being able to connect with the audience and the company to successfully market a product, which is related to sociability, extraversion, and assertiveness (Hu et al., 2019). A limitation in the analysis of these characteristics is that they are all measures of verbal communication (Riggio et al., 2003). The analysis of verbal communication may be a limitation when considering online interaction, as text on social media platforms may include emoticons and abbreviated words. Further, Foti and Hauenstein (2007) found that intelligence, self-efficacy, and dominance were positively associated with leader emergence and leader effectiveness (Foti & Hauensteiun, 2007). According to Kwok et al. (2018), there is relevance in testing the role of leader identity when considering leader emergence in a social network. Whereas studies have suggested that individuals who show more task-oriented behaviors are more likely to emerge in leadership positions, research also suggests that more attention to

positive interpersonal relations and consideration for those around them are also demonstrated in those who emerge as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991).

There are other factors that can impact the development of the qualities that occur in SMIs. There are individual predictors that can be utilized to examine SMI emergence. The Big Five model is a personality model that can be considered in influencer emergence, as it evaluates openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (Smith et al., 2018). According to Judge et al. (2002), the Big Five traits are positively correlated with leader emergence and leadership effectiveness. Namely, researchers found that extraversion was the strongest correlate of leader emergence, followed by conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, while agreeableness had the lowest correlation with leader emergence. Further, Walter et al. (2012) found that emotion recognition was indirectly related to extraversion, as emotion recognition was positively linked to leader emergence, which was positively related to extraversion. According to Woods (2016), companies seek out social media influencers who will incorporate the appropriate ad frequency along with reaching out to audience members to promote the product, while having the behaviors and a personality that will enhance the position of an SMI for the brand. When considering the behaviors of influencers when posting on social media, it is important to also consider that because the Big Five personality traits have been positively linked to leader emergence, it is likely that SMIs would have higher levels of each of the Big Five traits than non-SMIs. As individuals are stepping into the role of an SMI, they are accepting a role of leadership with responsibility; therefore, the personality traits are expected to be present in these individuals, while the non-SMIs are not stepping into the same roll and are not expected to

have the Big Five traits. As extant research has connected specific personality traits to leader emergence, it is expected that these traits will be more likely to be demonstrated in SMIs than non-SMIs.

Hypothesis 1: SMIs will have higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism than non-SMIs.

2.2.1 Stress in SMIs

Although individuals may differ in personality traits, stress can be experienced from several external influences and can be found in many individuals. Stress is the biological and cognitive response to situational factors and perceptions (Jamieson et al., 2012). Stress may cause negative responses when individuals are overwhelmed with physical or mental stimuli. The increase in social media platforms and users allows for anyone to access a large group of followers at any time. In the United States alone, in 2017 there were 213 million users on social media, which rose to 223 million users in 2020 (Clement, 2020). Whereas SMI access to a large pool of followers and friends seems positive, there are pressures and stressors that come with social media use as well. According to a study by Li et al. (2018), there was a bidirectional association between online social network addiction and depression. The results showed that depression contributed to online social network addiction, and depressed individuals experienced more harmful effects when engaging in social network use (Li et al., 2018). According to Fabris et al. (2020), the fear of missing out was positively linked to stress in an online context. The lack of a response from peers is what creates stress and creates perceived dislike and disapproval from their peers and followers. When considering the growth of social media use and the stress that is associated with online social network use, it is

important to consider potential negative cognitive and physical effects of social media use for SMIs.

Research has also found that mindfulness moderated the relations between workload and both mental and physical symptoms of strain, such that the symptoms of strain were lessened when the participant was more aware of the work environment (Fisher et al., 2017). There are many factors that can lead to individuals experiencing burnout, so it is important to find methods to alleviate these issues in the workplace. In a situation where employees are feeling overworked or burnt out, they may be less satisfied at work and may not perform as well. Research has suggested that social media use can be a coping mechanism when dealing with negative emotions, as the use of social media platforms has been positively linked to levels of stress (Brailovskaia et al, 2020). As social media can be tied to stress levels, researchers have also found a correlation between time spent on social media and levels of stress. According to Meir et al. (2016), researchers found that as participants increased the use of social media, the levels of stress increased, and levels of overall well-being decreased. As both social media use and the frequency with which one uses social media are positively related to stress, it is expected that there will be higher levels of stress in SMIs than non-SMIs due to the time spent on social media (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 2: SMIs will demonstrate more stress on social media than non-SMIs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

In the current study, participants consisted of 75 SMIs and 75 non-SMIs on Instagram who had posted within 30 days of the beginning of data collection and had public accounts that were in English. The SMI participants were randomly selected by searching for #paidsponsorship posts under the Instagram search tab, and the non-SMIs were randomly selected under the explore tab, which is the generic method of searching for Instagram. The participants were randomly chosen profiles under each category of the "For You" tab to ensure a more diverse sample. A new profile was made solely for the random selection of the participants and data collection to ensure that there were no algorithms inserting posts based on activity from a personal account. Each potential non-SMI profile was manually screened to ensure there were no product promotions or advertisements within the last 15 posts. The SMIs and non-SMIs needed to have at least 500 followers in order to ensure a consistent variable among participants across each of the two groups. The SMIs needed a minimum of one sponsored post within the most recent 15 posts.

3.1.1 Procedure

Linguistic analysis is the phonological, syntactic, and semantic analysis of verbiage to predict trends in text, which is very useful in identifying trends and the overall emotional attitudes of individuals using social media (Pennebaker et al., 2015). For instance, Wang et al. (2016) evaluated trends on Twitter to examine work stress and emotion. In this study,

researchers found that work-related tweets were less focused on emotion and stress words when compared to nonwork-related tweets; however, there was an increase in health issues in the work-related tweets in comparison to the nonwork-related tweets. The insight that linguistic analysis gives researchers on mental health has become further analyzed, such as the study conducted by Huston et al. (2018). In this study, researchers were interested in the clinical outcomes when linguistic analysis was applied to practice. The results showed that positive outcomes were associated with more positive emotion words, and fewer past focus words and negation words (Huston et al., 2018).

To evaluate these linguistic trends to apply them to research, the data were run through a popular software program called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2015). LIWC is a text analysis program that calculates categories of words used to provide insight into patterns of speech and text. In the current study, the LIWC software was used to analyze the 30 most recent posts, along with the captions, replies, and comments from each of these 30 posts by translating text into numeric values to indicate how much it represents each construct of interest (e., the Big Five factors, stress). For example, indicators of extraversion include positive emotions and indicators of inclusivity.

3.1.2 Measures

According to Pennebaker (2019), to assess stress, extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, emotions words can be singled out and run as percentages against the total text analyzed. The text is categorized according to the dictionaries and are then separated by each category chosen to analyze (Pennebaker, 2019). The software uses total word count within a specified category of words used and creates

an output that gives the category and frequency of the words in the analyzed text. The post made by the participant will have emotion words or social categories that the software will analyze into percentages that reveal the frequencies at which these words appeared in the selected text. The number of emotion words that are indicators of stress, or negative affect words will appear in percentages, and therefore will show which texts have higher percentages of stress words present. Stress was assessed by calculating the percentage of words identified as anger, sadness, and anxiety, which falls under the category of negative affect words in the categories in LIWC. As stress can be linked to negative emotions, LIWC will be used to highlight the negative emotion dictionary to find any percentages in the given texts in the data collected (Brailovskaia et al, 2020).

According to Judge et al. (2002), extraversion represents sociable characteristics and positive affect words; therefore, extraversion will be assessed by measuring the percentage of social words and positive affects used in the post which fall under the categories of "family," "friend," etc. The LIWC software utilizes drives to determine the presence of perceptual terms or "feel" text and positive emotions; therefore, agreeableness will be assessed by measuring the percentage of terms that are categorized as positive affect words and perceptual processes. Openness will be assessed by measuring the percentage of cognitive process terms that are used in the text, for example, "insight," as Judge et al. (2002) discusses the representation of imaginative as a characteristic of openness. Conscientiousness will be assessed by measuring the percentage of terms that fall under the category of "drives," as this category measures "achievement" and "affiliation." Neuroticism will be assessed by measuring the percentage of negative affect words and

differentiation, such as a definition of self or boundaries, of the individual present in the

texts.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

A series of independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine whether personality factors and stress levels differed between SMIs and non-SMIs. The results showed that SMIs (*M* = 2.42, *SD* = 0.84) had significantly higher levels of conscientiousness than non-SMIs (*M* = 2.02, *SD* = 1.20), *t*(148) = 2.38, *p* = .02; however, no significant differences were demonstrated among SMIs and non-SMIs in regard to stress, openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion. Figure 4.1, shown below, shows the comparison of each of the traits between SMIs and non-SMIs. The results indicated the levels of stress were not significantly different in SMIs (*M* = 0.20, *SD* = 0.16) in comparison to non SMIs (*M* = 0.19, *SD* = 0.18), *t*(148) = 0.45, *p* = .65. The results also indicated that the levels of extraversion were not significantly different in SMIs (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = 1.89) in comparison to non SMIs (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = 2.22), *t*(148) = 0.42, *p* = .68. Likewise, the results indicated that the levels of agreeableness were not significantly different in SMIs (*M* = 6.40, *SD* = 2.80) in comparison to non SMIs (*M* = 6.61, *SD* = 3.16), *t*(148) = -0.44, *p* = .66. The results also indicated that the levels of neuroticism were not significantly different in SMIs (*M* = 1.36, *SD* = 0.57) in comparison to non SMIs (*M* = 1.39, *SD* = 0.74), *t*(138.55) = -0.31, *p* = .76. Further, the results indicated that the levels of openness were not significantly different in SMIs (*M* = 1.76, *SD* = 0.67) in comparison to non SMIs (*M* = 1.77, *SD* = 0.81), *t*(148) = -0.11, *p* = .91. Taken together, the results show that the hypotheses that would show higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, openness,

and neuroticism than non-SMIs, and SMIs would demonstrate more stress on social media than non-SMIs were not supported.

Figure 4.1: Personality Traits and Levels of Stress between SMIs and Non-SMIs
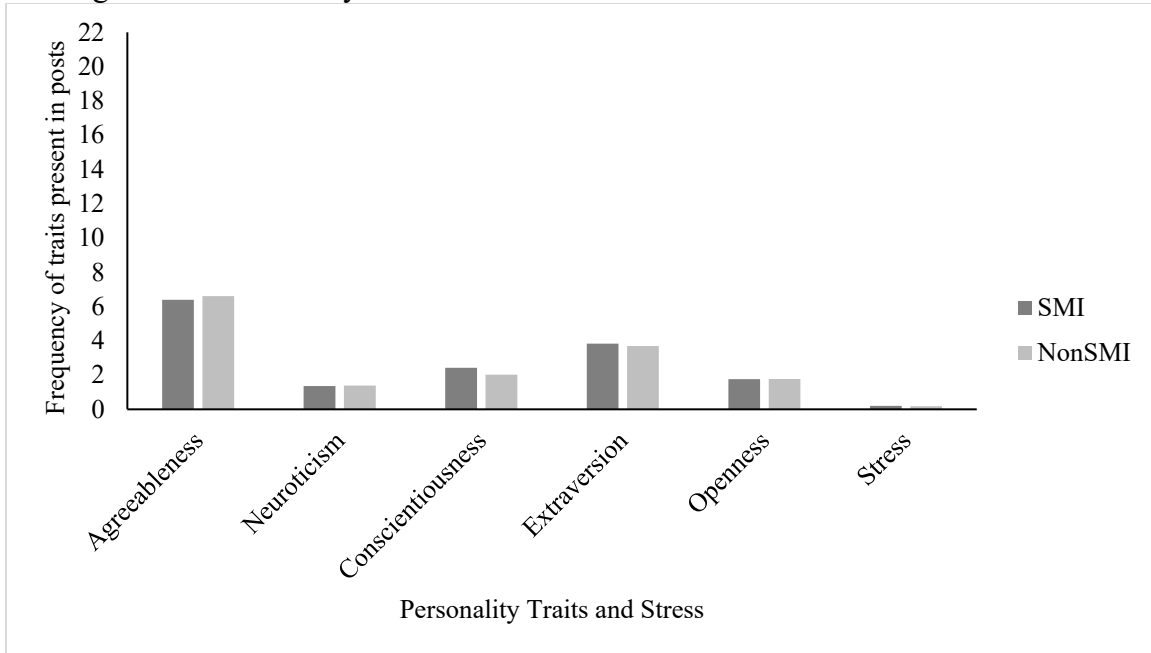
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the levels of stress between SMIs and non-SMIs on Instagram, particularly to determine if SMIs had higher levels of stress and differing personality traits in comparison to non-SMIs. The key findings of the current study suggest that there is no significant difference in levels of stress and many personality traits between SMIs and non-SMIs. Instead, the only significant result was the difference of conscientiousness in SMIs and non-SMIs. The difference in levels of conscientiousness between SMIs and non-SMIs may suggest that organizations should consider searching for higher levels of conscientiousness in the individuals they contract with. The presence of conscientiousness may suggest consistent role expectations and delivery of performance on product promotion (Bass, 1985). The results could suggest that the measurement of personality differences other than conscientiousness is not an effective method to identify SMIs. The findings from a study conducted by Smith et al. (2018), are consistent with the idea that SMIs are increasingly sought after for online marketing, which highlights the importance of the role of an SMI for brands to promote products.

As there was a lack of differences in levels of stress, openness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness, it is important to consider that differences among SMIs and non-SMIs should be evaluated with a different set of constructs of personality. For

example, the sociogenomic personality construct evaluates biological models of personality traits in individuals. This model integrates a more modern perspective that is unique to the individual, which considers external factors that may influence personality traits (Roberts & Jackson, 2008). This suggests that there are other aspects in which biological foundations should be considered when evaluating characteristics of personality traits. It is possible that relying on the filtered online presence of users is not a suitable method for evaluating emotions and personality.

There are unique indicators for SMIs which are important to evaluate to determine how they can benefit professionally from any models or programs developed. The findings from a study by Li et al. (2018) are consistent with the idea that individuals who are struggling with depression may also suffer from more harmful effects when engaging on a social media platform. This may suggest that SMIs who have preexisting difficulties such as depression may have a difficult time coping with the work responsibilities of product promotion, as it is focused on a social media platform. It is important to consider stress levels in SMIs as they are now considered to be employees that companies utilize for product promotion.

<center>5.1 Limitations</center>

The lack of difference of levels of openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, and stress between SMIs and non-SMIs could be attributed to using the explore tab for a method of collection for the non-SMIs. The algorithms on Instagram may have caused a lack of random selection in the non-SMI profiles. This is possible as the "For You" page will recommend profiles that are similar to ones that are viewed or interacted with. As the profiles were randomly selected, Instagram would then generate a "For You"

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page that is not as diverse in user suggestions and would simply suggest topics that are related to previous profiles viewed. Another limitation may have been the sample size that was used, as there may have been different results if the sample size were larger than 75 SMI profiles and 75 non-SMI profiles ($N = 150$). The larger sample size may have incorporated a more diverse sample of profiles from Instagram. The examination of captions, comments, and replies of each profile may have been a limitation, as the user dictates what is posted, and may be able to alter the perception of their emotions and personality traits to their audience.

5.2 Future Directions

Although there is no indication of higher stress levels in SMIs, further research should be considered to explore other methods of personality and stress measurement for SMIs to see if there are other differences present. It is also important to consider different methods of measurements of stress aside from linguistic text analysis, as it may be more beneficial to ask SMIs about their perceived stress regarding their social media presence directly. This method may be more accurate, as asking the SMIs directly and anonymously may yield more honest insight into their personal responses to the SMI role. It is important for researchers to consider that conscientiousness is an important trait to evaluate in potential SMIs.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to analyze any differences in personality traits and levels of stress in SMIs and non-SMIs. The role of SMIs in the workforce is becoming more efficient in the online marketing world, therefore it is important to analyze any potential difficulties that SMIs may face. The results showed that SMIs had significantly higher levels of conscientiousness; however, there were no significant differences in stress, openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion between SMIs and non-SMIs. As demonstrated by the findings of the present study, further research is needed to investigate a different model of personality traits to test any potential differences in stress levels and differences in personality traits.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Leslie Zuniga has been a student at The University of Texas at Arlington since 2018. She will attend UTA in the Fall of 2021 to join the Industrial/Organizational M.S. graduate program of the Department of Psychology at The University of Texas at Arlington. Leslie Zuniga is involved in research projects that examine the issues relevant to eLancing. Her research interests include prosocial and anti-social employee behavior, leadership, ethical decision making, creativity and innovation, and group processes. Her aspiration is to pursue a career in Industrial/Organizational Psychology to work in leadership development.