

Facebook users who post more personal, less political seen as more humorous

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(Phys.org) —Want to seem funnier on Facebook? Be more personal, less political. That's one lesson learned from new research by two KU communications scholars who analyzed how Facebook users express and judge each other's capacity for humor on the popular social media site.

The research, set for publication next month in the [academic journal](#) "HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research," showed that users who frequently posted about their daily life, included self-related anecdotes or referenced [pop culture](#) in status updates, were most likely to be viewed as humorous by their Facebook peers. On the other hand, political posts were shown to lead [peers](#) to consider a Facebook user less humorous, the research showed.

"People don't generally like [negativity](#) on Facebook," [doctoral student](#) Natalie Pennington said. "So you see a lot of people who will work hard to put a spin on something bad they heard about or that happened to them, and in doing so, they typically employ some form of humor."

For the study, detailed in "An Analysis of Humor Orientation on Facebook: A Lens Model Approach," Pennington and associate professor of [communication studies](#) Jeffrey Hall recruited 100 "target" participants (Facebook [profile](#) owners) in March 2010. The targets allowed their profiles to be part of the study.

The targets represented age and gender [demographics](#) of Facebook users at that time. Of those selected to participate, 88 percent were white and

57 percent were female. Their mean age was about 32 years old.

Target participants completed online surveys assessing their own "humor orientation" or ability to be humorous. They were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "I regularly tell jokes when in groups" and "People usually laugh when I tell jokes or funny stories."

Next, 35 "observers" were chosen to examine the 100 Facebook targets' profiles. These observers spent about 15 minutes looking at users' main profile pages, eight most recent profile photos, info pages and recent wall posts and status updates. Afterward, the observers rated the profile owner's "humor orientation," or ability to produce humor.

The purpose of the separate assessments: to allow researchers to see the relationship between "perceptions of personality" of the observers and the self-reported personality traits of the profile owners themselves.

The observers analyzed 53 "cues" in six categories: current profile picture, past profile pictures, wall activity, status updates and Facebook friends' responses to them, and the user info page.

In a profile picture, for example, researchers coded whether the profile owner was photographed with friends or alone, what activities appeared to be taking place and even whether alcohol was being consumed.

Then, researchers looked at how those cues correlated with the targets' self-reported survey answers, to determine which best indicated a user's humor orientation.

Results of the quantitative analysis showed targets who considered themselves more humorous were likely to make repeated attempts at humor in three Facebook profile areas: the status update, the info page and the profile picture. Importantly, those same cues were related to the

[observers'](#) impressions of targets' humor orientation.

The takeaway, said Hall, is that the more often a Facebook user attempts to make jokes on his page, the more likely other users are to assume he's a funny person.

"The best way to be funny and to be perceived as funny on Facebook is to try a lot," he said.

Correlations were found between a high humor orientation and the number of "likes" profile owners received from their Facebook friends on status updates, as well as the number of unique commenters on status updates.

Targets with high humor orientation also talked more about romantic relationships in their status updates and had more friendly- or outgoing-looking friends in their profile pictures.

"These results show that a user who is high in (humor orientation) displays their ability to produce humor in all aspects of the profile, including profile pictures, status updates and the info page, and in doing so encourages 'likes' and comments from Facebook friends," Pennington and Hall wrote.

The research could be groundbreaking in the ongoing study of how people form impressions of others when they're communicating exclusively online.

"A sense of humor is one of the most prized personality traits someone can have," Hall said. "It's so valuable, it makes sense that people would find ways to express it on a site like Facebook."

The qualitative analysis revealed what topics people most often joked

about in their status updates, profile info pages and in photos. Daily life events were the primary vehicle for humor on Facebook, ranging from encounters at work or home to spending time with friends and family. These types of [status updates](#) received the most "likes" from friends.

And though it may not garner as many "likes" as other types of humor, self-deprecating jokes—made by the profile owner at his own expense—are still effective.

"When you write a status update that is self-deprecating, you don't expect people to 'like' it—you expect them to comment about how that's not true, and you're so wonderful—you want social support from your friends," Pennington said. "Whether you're making fun of yourself or events in your life, taking time to attempt [humor](#) in the stories you share on Facebook makes other people think you are a funnier person."

Provided by University of Kansas

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