MASARYK UNIVERSITY

The risk of online communities: Who is prone to behavioral change by community members?

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Introduction

- Online/virtual communities
- Internet-mediated communities (IMCs)

- OC characteristics:
  - Sense of belonging, share of interest, information, mutual support
  - Group norms

- Risk online communities:
  - Pro-ana, self-harming, suicidal, emo, drug,..

http://participaction.wordpress.com/2008/07/15/scale/

Present study

- Concern of risk online communities – norms adaption & behavioral change of (new) members

- RQ: who is prone to (harmful) behavioral change in online communities?

- (Endangered) children's characteristics
  - Offline relationships – sense of belonging
  - Emotions
- Community characteristics
- Members' characteristics

PEER-LESS.

http://spacecadetbling.com/art/peer-less/
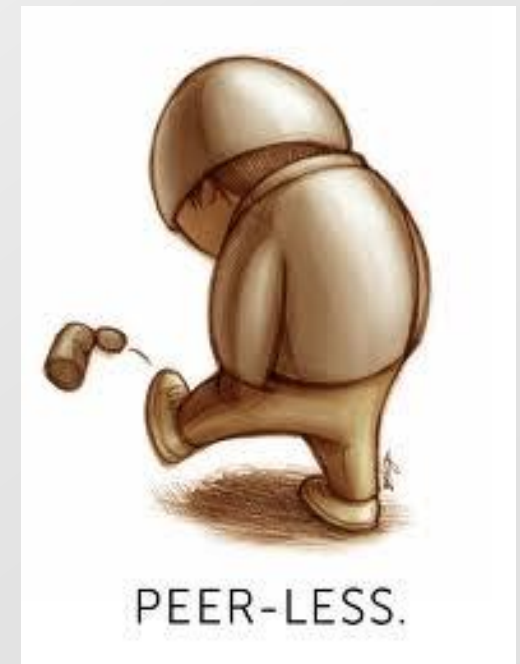
Method

- Study on online risks in random schools in Czech republic, age 10-18, N = 3,105, 2012

- Present study sample: online community members

- *On the Internet there are a lot of places where people of similar interests or opinions meet. They can meet e.g. on discussion forums, blogs, chats, in games or in special groups in social network sites. Sometimes these people create groups which their members visit regularly, they often use a nickname, know each other, talk to each other or exchange information or materials.*

- *Do you personally visit such a place or group regularly?*

Sample

- Online community members
- Those, whose contact with other community members remained primarily or exclusively online

- $N = 503$
- Age: $M = 14.14$, $SD = 1.89$
- 57 % boys

Measures: Dependent variable

▶ **Tendency to comply with (harmful) norms**

- ▶ 3 items, 4-point scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree)
- ▶ $M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.75$, Cronbach alpha = .66

- ▶ *I would stay in this group even if it meant doing something wrong.*
- ▶ *I'd rather act the way they want me to than to lose them.*
- ▶ *I say things I do not really believe because it brings me more respect in the group.*

Measures: Individual variables

- **Age, gender**
- **Peer rejection**
  - 6 items, 5-point scale (never - always)
  - $M = 1.92$, $SD = 0.80$, Cronbach alpha = .87
  - e.g. *„They lie to me.", „They insult me."*
- **Anxiety/depression**
  - 8 items, 3-point scale (never – sometimes – often)
  - $M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.45$, Cronbach alpha = .78
  - e.g. *„I worry too much.", „I am unhappy."*

Measures: Community level variables

- **Sense of belonging**
  - 5 items, 4-point scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree)
  - $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.74$, Cronbach alpha = .83
  - e.g. *„I can feel that I belong to this group.", „When I do not visit this group for a longer time, I feel that something is missing."*
- **Distinctiveness of community's members**
  - 4 items, 4-point scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree)
  - $M = 2.13$, $SD = 0.74$, Cronbach aplha = .76
  - e.g. *„I trust them more than people I normally meet in person.", „They are significantly different from people I normally meet in person."*
- **Exclusivity**
- 4-point scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree)
- $M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.96$
- 1 item: *„Hardly anybody manages to really fit in this group."*

Demographic variables

Demographic variables

Demographic variables

Individual level variables

Individual level variables

Analysis:

3 step regression

Community level variables

Results

	Step 1				Step 2				Step 3			
	B	*SE*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*p*
Constant	2.50	0.28		0.00	1.83	0.34		0.00	0.38	0.28		0.18
Demographical variables												
Gender (male)	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.29	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.28	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.67
Age	-0.06	0.02	**-0.15**	0.00	-0.05	0.02	**-0.13**	0.01	-0.03	0.01	**-0.08**	0.03
Individual variables												
Peer rejection					0.13	0.04	**0.15**	0.00	0.08	0.03	**0.08**	0.03
Anxiety/depresivity					0.15	0.08	**0.09**	0.07	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.70
Online community perception												
Members' distinctivness									0.51	0.04	**0.52**	0.00
Sense of belonging									0.14	0.04	**0.14**	0.00
Exclusivity									0.08	0.03	**0.11**	0.00
F(df)		5.35 (2)				6.78 (4)				53.68 (7)		
R^2		0.02				0.06				0.46		
ΔR^2		0.02				0.03				0.40		
p		0.01				0.00				0.00		

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Conclusions

- Older children are less willing to change their behavior
  - Identity achievement
- Children with unsatisfying offline relationships tend to look for friends online and are willing to change to be liked
  - Need to belong

- Limitations:
  - Self-reports
  - Cross-sectional data
  - Hypothetical behavioral change
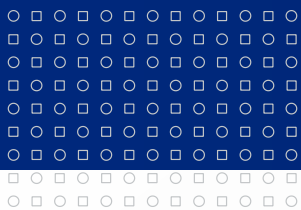
Thank you for your attention.

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