



High Schoolers Tell All: Analyzing Facebook Confession Sites

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Background

Facebook confession sites have gained popularity, giving youth another venue to anonymously post secrets, rants, and insults. Facebook confession sites are set up in that posts are anonymous while "likes" or comments on the post identify the user by name. Confession sites appear to be associated with high schools, as they may contain the high school name, mascot, acronym, city or state, however, most Facebook confession sites are not affiliated or sanctioned by the high school they are associated with. Concerns were risen about cyberbullying and the effects of the sites on the reputation of the school.

Cyber bullying is using electronic communication devices to threaten, intimidate, or insult someone. Cyber bullying has been associated with depression and suicide (Sinclair, Bauman, Poteat, Koenig, & Russel, 2011).

Anonymity influences the type of information people are willing to disclose. Moore, Nakano, Enomoto, & Suda (2012) stated, "Cyberbullies utilize anonymity to reduce the ability of the victim to defend themselves and to shield the cyberbully from social consequences" (p. 861). Anonymity is also a principle factor that creates the online disinhibition effect, which is the tendency to self disclose more frequently or intensely online than in person (Suler, 2004).

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the language of High School Facebook confessions sites to determine the percentage of words in posts that have positive and negative emotionality. Posts were evaluated on words categorized as: social, positive emotion, negative emotion, anxiety, anger, sadness, work, body, health, sexual, death, and swearing. We will also analyze the number of "likes" for each category of original anonymous posts.

Overall, we hope to begin understanding the sudden popularity of high school Facebook confession pages.

While it was hypothesized that posts would include more negative emotion than positive emotion and that posts that were more emotional would receive more "likes", results show:

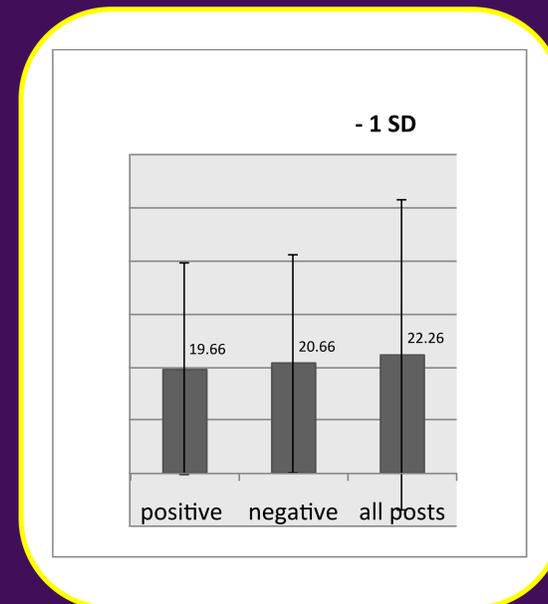
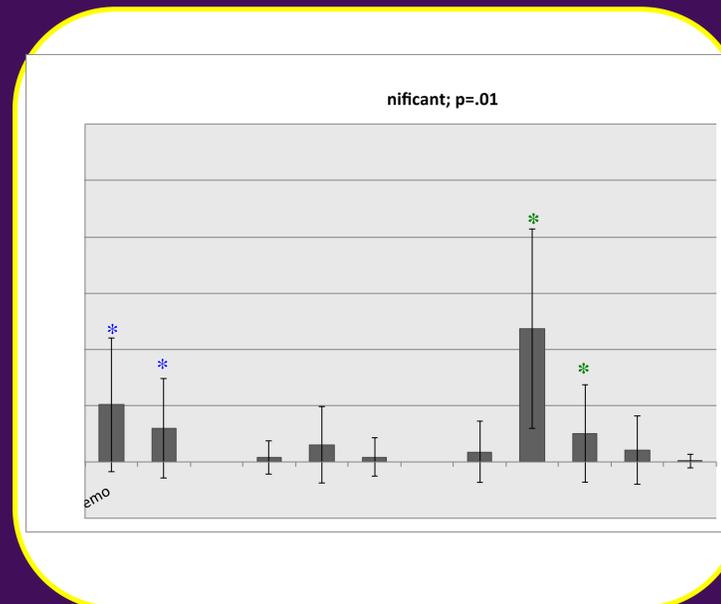
- Posts had significantly more positive emotion than negative emotion.
- Emotionally charged posts were not significantly "liked" compared to more neutral posts.

Method

Facebook confession pages were selected using google.com, yahoo.com, bing.com, aol.com, and facebook.com, and the search term "Facebook high school confessions" to locate high school confession sites. A list of fifty-four high school confession sites was created based on the criteria of having identifiable features of a specific US high school. From this list, ten confession sites were randomly selected for the analysis of posts occurring during a common 3 month time period.

Each post, comment, and site description was edited for spelling, grammar, and punctuation and manually entered into Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software program. The LIWC is able to identify the emotionality (e.g. positive emotions, negative emotions, anxiety, anger, sadness) of text based on a well developed database of words for each construct. LIWC used a range of text samples to develop their database. Included is a sample of 714,000 internet logs/blogs from between 2001-2004. The LIWC is a well developed, statistically valid research based tool for evaluating linguistic data (Kahn, Tobin, Massey, & Anderson, 2007).

The number of likes and comments was also recorded for each post.



Results

Descriptive Statistics:

- 10 Schools with posts between April 8th and June 8th, 2013
- N=1559 posts; N = 3408 comments

Is there a significantly higher percentage of negatively charged posts?

- * Paired Samples t-test to compare means
- 5.07% (Average positive words per post) [Blog samples from LIWC = 3.72]
- 3.02% (Average negative words per post) [Blog samples from LIWC = 2.07]

Are extremely negative or positively charged posts "liked" more than neutral posts?

- * Independent Samples t-test to compare means
- No; Average likes for all posts was 22.26
- They were not significantly different

Discussion

Overall, this project helped us understand the topics that teenagers were confessing and the emotionality of their words.

One outlying question is why do teens post anonymously on Facebook?

- Perhaps *any* posting is reinforcing (97% of posts were liked).
- Perhaps teens can post about specific people without retribution (See Future Research).

Another factor revealed in the data is that negative posts are "liked" about as much as positive posts. This is concerning for a variety of reasons:

- "liking" negative posts could reinforce cyber-bullying.
- "liking" negative posts may maintain negative posting – very much like gambling.

Limitations:

- LIWC does not analyze novel slang words, sarcasm, symbols or emoticons that may contribute to emotionality.
- It is possible that emotional posts may have been deleted by Facebook users prior to data collection.

Future Research:

- What is the relation between posts with personally identifiable names and "likes" and "comments"?
- Does emotionality change when slang, sarcasm, and emoticons are included in coding for emotionality?
- How does teen anonymous posting compare to other social media samples?

References

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rasmus Knobbe and Christopher Fast for their help with data collection. Dr. Kathy Bertsch and Rachel Burlet for their support and dedication. Dr. Daniel Houlihan and Meghan Houlihan for their background research on this topic. Minnesota State University, Mankato for undergraduate grant funding to complete this project.