



RESEARCH PAPER

Social Media and Narcissism: Cultivation Analysis of Association, Elements and Reasons

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of Instagram, as a social networking site, focused on the sharing of visual data is increasing among young people. Despite having significant social benefits, it also is reported to have adverse effects on psychological, social and physical well-being including narcissism. Along with investigating the relationship between Instagram usage and narcissism, this study also compared the level of narcissism among gender based on Instagram usage. A total of 300 Instagram users from different universities of Lahore completed an online survey regarding Instagram usage and narcissism. The results showed that there is a significant association ($N=300, r=1$) between narcissism and Instagram usage. A frequent update of profile picture by the individuals with higher narcissism was found, and also regarded their profile pictures to be more appealing. In reference to narcissism, there was a positive association between usage of Instagram and a desire to be cool. An association between gender and online behavior was also found, ($N=300, P=0.39$) with women have spending more time on editing pictures and engaging more likes/ comments activities. There was only weak evidence between gender difference and personality trait ($N=300, P=0.57$). However, the negative correlation between personality trait and gender call for further examination.

KEYWORDS Gender, Instagram Usage, Narcissism

Introduction

Instagram is one of the most rapidly growing social media platforms worldwide. providing it's users with the opportunity to build online relationships. Instagram lets it's users share their photos and videos with little to no text presented. On an average day Instagram is used by 300 million users who generate 2.5 billion likes. More than 700 million photographs are shared daily on this particular SNS. For users the most attractive characteristic of this SNS is socializing by putting a certain self-image in front of the world. Any SNS which provides the opportunity for the user to self-promote by putting forth personal information and images is gaining immense popularity. The need to self-present and the basic human feeling to belong are fulfilled by such SNSs (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). However, SNSs have certain disadvantages, too. Being a visual medium, Instagram becomes an ideal platform for users to exhibit their narcissism related behaviors and thus gratify their desires of admiration and popularity. SNS predominantly promotes self obsession among youth and a great concern over their public image. The dopamine rush due to receiving *likes* can be addictive (specially among younger users), causing obsession over posting the perfect photo and portraying the perfect lifestyle to generate as many of

these likes as possible. The constant consumption of edited and filtered content on social media sites, such as Instagram or Facebook, especially content of narcissistic can cause the users to set unrealistic standards for themselves (Muzaffar, Chohdhry, & Afzal, 2019). It causes them to believe that they should be at a certain point in their lives by a certain time. This ultimately ends in disappointment when the users fail to meet those unrealistic standards. This constant disappointment in themselves can cause users to become insecure of their lifestyles. Therefore they may start filtering and editing their own content as an act of desperation. They feel that their 'real self' isn't worth praise and therefore feel the need to trick others to gain approval to feed their low self esteem. And this vicious cycle continues.

Literature Review

Instagram facilitates users by providing them with a platform where they can upload their "selfies" and monitor positive feedback. According to Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati (2014) more than half of the pictures posted on Instagram are categorized as selfies. These pictures are basically a form of self-presentation and self-documentation (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). The association between selfies and behavior - reward feedback carries the ability to get addicted to SNSs (Guedes et al., 2016;). Many studies have highlighted the relation between the need to self-promote through selfie sharing (Boursier & Manna, 2018; Doğan & Çolak, 2016; Sorokowska et al., 2016). According to Rui and Stefanone (2013) impression management on SNS have gained vast popularity with smartphone users. Similarly, Lee, Lee, Moon and Sung's 2015 study showed that Instagram users had a social and psychological need for self-expression. They upload such pictures which puts forth their ideal image. An interesting comparison between Instagram and Twitter showed that users preferred Instagram because of the feedback which users receive on their pictures (Forte et al., 2014). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) believe that SNSs are beneficial for networking with friends and sharing information. Non the less the use of SNSs has a dark side to it as well. Adverse social and psychological impacts related to the use of SNSs are well researched.

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Narcissism is a personality feature. It comprises of the characteristics like extreme sense of self-importance, a desire to be admired excessively, and considering oneself as unique. It is also defined as a perception about your own self that is positive but unrealistic (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). For narcissists, SNSs are ideal platforms which provides them with the opportunity to portray themselves as per their self-perception and desires (Casale, Fioravanti, & Rugai, L. (2016). Excessive usage of SNSs not only accelerates narcissism but also causes many other undesired consequences. This phenomenon has gained significant scholarly attention. Hogue, and Mills, (2019) for instance found that how exposure to an ideal body image on SNS not only had negative effects on the mood of young women but also causes body dissatisfaction among them. Not being "Instagrammable" or active like "influencers" causes stress among those who do not qualify for these standards.

To be cool is another narcissism related desire. Posts and manipulated photos are reflection of the desire of narcissist to be perceived in a certain way (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). An increase in uploading selfies, frequently updating of profile photos, and daily

usage of Instagram were some of the behaviors associated with being "cool" (Moon et al., 2016). Selfie-marketing is another tool of presenting and promoting on SNSs. The users, particularly the narcissist, tend to post pictures which will be perceived as more "attractive", in order to obtain positive responses, and gain the admiration of their followers. Like other narcissism related behavior, selfie-marketing is also higher among narcissist who consider their selfies as more attractive. This causes an increase in level of narcissism (Valenzuela, & Katz, 2016). The probability of being extravert and being narcissist is higher among heavy users who frequently take selfies (Chae, 2017).

Narcissism as a trait is found to be more common in young age users and females, especially those in their twenties (Lee & Sung, 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015, 2018;). The reasons include the increased use of social media among youth which find it to be the appropriate place for being socialized and popular. Frequent posting of selfies by the female users of social media is the indicator of narcissism among females. However, some studies found body-objectification and self-promotion as being common among both male and female users (Boursier et al., 2020).

Recent studies, however have come up with surprising results as no association between narcissism and selfie was found (Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017; Wu, Song, & Ma, 2019). Some even found a higher level of narcissism and other related behaviors among young men (Arpaci et al., 2018). Selfie posting is one of the activities, user do obsessively. It is narcissism-related activity practiced by social media users. Research has attempted to seek association between posting Selfies on Instagram and narcissism associated features that included Leadership, Grandiose exhibitionism and exploitativeness and find the association of selfi posting with the first two facets but not the third one i-e Exploitativeness. From among the studied features, leadership and exploitativeness were found a strong predictor of selfie posting among women and men respectively. Whereas Interestingly this national level survey with both genders did not find any difference among the respondents belonging to different age groups. (Weiser, E. B, 2015)

After posting selfies, feedback and responses from other people in the form of "Comments" and "Likes" become the major concerns of the users. Similarly being attentive and reactive to selfies posted by others is also believed to be a scale to measure the level of narcissism among users. Both these behaviors i-e the degree to which a user is concerned with the feedback on their post and their behavior towards others are associated with the level of narcissism. (Lee, & Sung, 2016).

Another trend that determines the behavior of the users of Instagram and particularly young adults is the desire to get maximum Likes on their posted photos. For the gratification of their needs of attention -seeking and approval from others, young adults in the forms of Likes. Stronger narcissism has been found a predictor of both types of like-seeking behaviors i-e normative and Deceptive. (Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Davis, & Giulietti, 2017) The study also identified mediating factors of the association between narcissism and deceptive like-seeking. These included a desire of rise in popularity and demonstration of creativity among young people were identified as being more susceptible of deceptive behavior.

Narcissism has many types and researchers have studied the association of different typed of narcissism with social media use. Many meta-analyses have been conducted to assemble the scientific data on the relationship between different types of narcissism and online behaviors. The purpose was to find out that whether uploading photos and the frequency of the usage of social media associate with narcissism or not. While most studies opted quantitative methodology to study the phenomenon of

narcissism in the particular context of SNSs, some researchers (Casale, & Banchi, (2020) did a meta analysis of electronic literature databases, to review the literature on the association between narcissism and problematic social media use and found a constant and positive relationship between grandiose narcissism and Problematic facebook use.

Unlike the above discussed study, that had focus facebook and found association with grandiose narcissism, other researchers found it significant to seek the association between communal narcissism and social media (e-g Instagram, Twitter and Reddit). (Kristinsdottir, Gylfason, & Sigurvinsdottir, 2021) & (Muzaffar, Yaseen. Safdar, 2020). The common thing in both studies was the selection of the use and frequency of selected SNSs. An increased use of both Instagram and Twitter was found associated with communal narcissism. This association, however was not found between Reddit and Communal narcissism. The study also identified Validation and rating as two significant mediating factors of the association between communal narcissism and sharing on SNSs. These mediating factors have been focus of many other studies that attempted to seek the motivation and mediating factors of association between narcissism and social media use

Self-promotion is a major motivation behind using SNSs and the failure to achieve this target results in certain anti-social behaviors. Researchers have studied both in the context of narcissism. Carpenter, C. J. (2012). Expecting undue social support, not receiving comments on updated status, and responding to negative comments in a harsh way are reported behaviors of narcissists. Association between grandiose narcissism and self-promotion and exploitativeness and anti-social behavior assumed which turned out to be true.

Sheldon, & Bryant, (2016) were interested in exploring the motives behind using Instagram among students as well as relationship between age and narcissism. The main reasons for Instagram use were, "Surveillance," "Documentation," "To be cool," and "Creativity." The study also revealed a positive association of interpersonal interaction and social activity with Instagram. Similarly association between narcissism and instagram was also found positive. This association in the particular context of gender has also been studied, hypothesizing the greater inclination of posting selfies on Instagram among narcissist. Men with high score in narcissism were found more involved in posting different types of selfies e-g their personal selfie, romantic selfie with partner and group selfie. No association between narcissism score and selfie posting behavior among women was found (Sorokowski, , Sorokowska, Oleszkiewicz, Frackowiak, Huk, & Pisanski, 2015).

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This study thus aimed to investigate that what gratification consumers sought by sharing photos on Instagram and to explore the association between narcissism and usage of Instagram. It further intended to seek the role of gender in this regard.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and gratification framework is often used to determine whether the audience prefers one media over its competitors along with seeking satisfaction for their needs. The study aimed to explore the motivations behind posting selfies, and the relationship between posters of those selfies and narcissistic personalities.

Theoretical foundations of this study partially based on the cultivation approach to suggest that people who spend more time on Instagram have an increased tendency to

accept and allow their attitudes to be affected by, the portrayal of the world's social realities by the media that they consume.

Material and Methods

Quantitative research methodology was used to conduct this study. Data from a sample of 300 active users of Instagram (both male and female) was collected through an online survey.

Narcissism

Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale- A 10-item scale which measures participants' covert narcissism score was used (Hendin & Cheek, 1997) on 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Instagram usage

Instagram usage was measured by using items that were formulated to explore that how much time the users spend on Instagram and why they use Instagram?

Self-Satisfaction

Self-Satisfaction behavior was measured by using 10- items statements. The statements intended to measure, the level of satisfaction from appreciation on their posts for their appearances, likes and reactions on their posts, maximum number of positive responses. The desire to receive higher level of self-admiration was hypothesized to predict higher levels of grandiose narcissism.

Statistical Analysis

First, in order to investigate the relationship between Instagram usage and narcissism, Pearson correlations were computed. Independent *t*-tests were used to assess any difference in level of narcissism between male and female users of Instagram on self-satisfaction and personality trait respectively.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Correlations

		Instagram. users	Total.PT
Instagram. users	Pearson Correlation	1	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	305	304
Total. PT	Pearson Correlation	.550**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	304	305

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation was performed. As can be seen in Table 1 Perfect positive correlation between Instagram usage and narcissism were calculated.

Results of the independent sample *t*-test between male and female users of Instagram on self-satisfaction.

Table 2

Independent Samples Test		T-test Equality of Means							
Levene's Test Equality of Variances									
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total.SS	4292	.039	-2778	303	.006	-2.21953	.79901	-3.79458	-.64721
				293.305	.006	-2.21953	.80030	-3.79458	-.64448

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

Table 3
T-Test

Group Statistics				
	Gender of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total. SS	male	150	26.3831	6.39055
	female	150	28.6026	7.52780

The results found that that there is a contrast between male and female Instagram users regarding self-satisfaction (N=300, P=0.39). The findings regarding personality traits indicated no difference between male and female users of Instagram (N=300, P=0.57).

Table 4
Results of the independent sample t test btw male and female users of Instagram on personality trait.

Levene's Test Equality of Variances		T-test Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total. PT	.313	.576	-2.891	303	.004	-2.21917	.76766	-3.72978	-.70856
				302.996	.004	-2.21917	.76763	-3.72973	-.70861

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

Table 5
T-Test

Group Statistics					
	Gender of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean

Total.PT	male	153	27.3137	6.73704	.54466
	female	152	29.5329	6.66901	.54093

An independent sample t-test was conducted to seek effect of personality traits on the level of narcissism. No significant difference was found ($N=300$, $P>.05$) in this regard. Social media allows a narcissist to have even greater illusion of being splendor. You can be anyone you want to be on social media, and you can lie about your age, your gender, your job, your location, etc., etc. For a narcissist, it can be a constant source of fuel for the delusions. A narcissist can post about anything, true or not true, and he/she will get attention for it. That fuels their fire to post more and do more to gain more attention, and it can become an incessant need to post on social media to have that constant attention. It is one of the attributes of the social media narcissist that they edit their pictures before posting for appreciation (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). The findings from this study indicated that most of the Instagram users prefer to edit their picture before posting to fulfill the gratification of attention seeking. Instagram offers a number of features including Filters, (e-g age reducing filters, whitening filters, fake lenses, filters that slim you down, hair changing filters, full make-up, natural look filters etc etc). These filters enables the user to modify their original photo into an ideal one. So, these findings are similar to the findings that are obtained from previous studies on certain inbuilt functions of Instagram that help users to edit their pictures before uploading and also how narcissist people use filters and special effects in order to be noticed by friends who appreciate them (Davenport et al., 2014; Lee, et.al., 2016).

Narcissist people are more engaged in posts, like, and positive comments activities on SNS's. The findings suggested that Instagram users worry about how many people comment, like and react to the things they post. These results are also in consistence with the findings of previous studies that have reported similar concerns among narcissist users. (Boursier et al., 2020; Brailovskaia & Bierhoff, 2016; Davenport et al., 2014, Nardis & Panek 2018).

The findings obtained by using a 10-item Hypersensitive have provided evidence that few characteristics of Narcissism Scale narcissist people do exist among Instagram users as they over think about their personal matters, their well being, their cares or their personal relations, become self-conscious and feel gaze of people when they enter a room, projecting their own insecurities and negative feelings onto those people and are more sensitive to their comments and remarks.

Our t-test result have shown that there is a difference between male and female users of Instagram regarding self-satisfaction as the value of level of significance is less than 0.5 ($N=300$, $P=0.39$) but the difference between male and female users of Instagram regarding personality is not very significant, the value being greater than 0.5, ($N=300$, $P=0.57$). Findings from self-satisfaction are consistent with those of Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington, (2017); Fox & Rooney, (2015); Lee & Sung, (2016); McCain et al., (2016); Sorokowski et al., (2015); Weiser, (2015, 2018); Boursier et al., (2020). The result shows that women tend to post more on Instagram as compared to men. This is reflected in women's behavior of posting on social media websites. Previous studies, especially those whose focus was primarily on the usage of Facebook, also confirm this notion (Sheldon, 2008; 2015). The consumption of SNS is higher among women in general, however, Instagram in particular is found to be more appealing to women than men (Acar, 2008; Sheldon, 2008). Women have more Facebook friends and they also spend more time communicating with them (Acar, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Bond, 2009). Women are constantly influenced by the patriarchic society around them, which gives out the message that they are nothing more than their bodies. The constant scrutiny of female bodies under

the male gaze, and the reward, and male attention that comes with conforming to patriarchal norms causes women to develop internal misogyny and view their own selves as objects who are intended to do nothing more than fulfill men's needs. The media industry in particular, prioritizes the male gaze over the mental and physical health of their female viewers. The message of patriarchy is constantly reinforced and unhealthy, unrealistic bodies are promoted to the female viewers, whereas natural female bodies are shamed. Considering all the results, this research proved the not only does Instagram provide platform to it's users allowing them to express their existing narcissistic tendencies but also results in other unintended consequences of the consumption of SNSs. This also shows the presence of other mediating factors on association between narcissism and social media use. The findings thus supported the theoretical framework of uses and gratification that's a Instagram users gratified their need for attention seeking through picture posting and editing and people who have more exposure to media are more narcissist as compared to the people who have less exposure. The association between the higher use and level of narcissism among females also supports cultivation effects. However the presence of mediating factors should also be considered while interpreting these findings.

Conclusion

The significant association between narcissism and Instagram usage demands serious consideration by all the stake holders. The reported online behavior has found women spending more time on editing pictures and engaging in more likes/ comments activities. There was only weak evidence between gender differences and personality traits. However, the negative correlation between the personality trait of the narcissism scale and gender difference warrants further examination.

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