

Facebook and Self-Perception

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Abstract

With connections being made every day between people all over the world, Facebook provides an unparalleled opportunity for study into the behavior of individuals and their personalities, presentations, and pathologies. Are there certain types of behaviors that relate more to narcissistic traits and, if so, what does a general sociodemographic profile look like for an individual who most often exhibits those behaviors? Nearly sixty participants were included in the study. Despite the limitations, this study concluded like several before it, no significant correlations were found in the data to support a hypothesis that narcissistic individuals are more likely to utilize Facebook in any more grandiose manner than the rest of us.

Facebook and Self-Perceptions

Facebook stands as a global giant in the world of social media. With connections being made every day between people all over the world, Facebook provides an unparalleled opportunity for study into the behavior of individuals and their personalities, presentations, and pathologies.

In some cases, like with Toma and Hancock (2011), researchers believe the evidence shows individuals can turn to Facebook to feel better when they are distressed in personal circumstances. Other researchers (Skues, Williams, & Wise, 2012) determined that lonely people used Facebook to connect with others but that narcissism and other similar traits did not have significant association with Facebook use. Conversely, the Carpenter study (2012) revealed that certain behaviors presented on Facebook did relate to narcissism when examining self-presentation and anti-social behavior.

There are mixed findings on studies correlating the posting of selfies to Facebook as an indicator of narcissism. Posting too many times on Facebook might make someone else look desperate or it may conjure up that psychological catchphrase, “attention-seeking behavior.” The information is confusing with so many different studies and results. The current study seeks to add a dimension by taking a Cerberus-type approach to the question of narcissism and Facebook by seeking to correlate social media use—in particular, Facebook—with specific demographic information in relation to narcissistic traits.

Simply put: are there certain types of behaviors that relate more to narcissistic traits and, if so, what does a general sociodemographic profile look like for an individual who most often exhibits those behaviors?

Method

Participants

The participant pool consisted of 46 females (79%) and 11 males (19%) and 1 transgender female (2%) for a total of 58 individuals with ages ranging between Under 21 and 21-40 [$M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.7$]. The sample consists of 35 White or Caucasian or European American (60.3%), 2 African-American or Black (3.4%), 19 Hispanic or Latina or Latino (32.8%), 1 Asian or Asian American (1.7%), and 1 Multiracial or Biracial (1.7%).

All participants were college students from Angelo State University and volunteered through the Department of Psychology and Sociology. Extra credit for a psychology course was awarded for participation.

Materials

Descriptive Data. A questionnaire requesting information about each participant's gender identity, racial identity, age, marital status, sexual identity, level of education, religious worldview, political affiliation, housing situation, and work situation was administered to participants.

Facebook Usage Questionnaire. The Facebook Usage Questionnaire (FUQ) was a researcher-designed measure that examined Facebook usage along five dimensions: *frequency*, *opportunity*, *location*, *content*, and *audience*. Participants were asked questions about how often they logged into Facebook, how many devices they used to log into Facebook, where they logged into Facebook, the types of content about which they posted on Facebook, and the audience filters they used when posting on Facebook.

Narcissism. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006) is a forced choice format of 16 items with choices such as “I really like to be the center of attention” and “I am an extraordinary person” on a 4-point scale. In one study to establish validity, the NPI-16 proved an internal consistency of .72; mean inter-item correlation = .13; loadings on the first unrotated factor ranged from .13 to .66 with the first factor capturing 19.9 percent of variance; correlated with the NPI-40 at $r = .90$ ($p < .001$)

Procedures

The study included an informed consent form, which all participants prior to the administration of the surveys, in which they acknowledged their understanding of the process and basic details of the study.

Once all participants completed the sociodemographic survey, the FUQ, and the NPI-16, respectively, all participants were debriefed as to the full nature of the study and assured of the anonymity of their responses.

Results

A bivariate correlation was conducted between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16) and the Facebook Usage Questionnaire (FUQ). There was no significant correlation revealed between the narcissistic traits ($M=19.79$, $SD=3.10$) chosen by an individual and his or her expressed Facebook habits ($M=157.45$, $SD=21.92$), $r = .046$, $p = .732$.

No significant correlations were found in the data to support a hypothesis that narcissistic individuals are more likely to utilize Facebook in any more grandiose manner than the rest of us.

Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between social media use—in particular, Facebook—with specific demographic information in relation to narcissistic traits. There was no correlation found in the data between social media use and narcissistic traits with or without any specific demographic information.

There has been a significant amount of research conducted examining Facebook and narcissism which has come to no clear correlation between Facebook use and narcissism. One study, using the original NPI-40, found that larger exhibitionism correlated with self-promotion, entitlement correlated with anti-social behaviors, and that self-esteem negatively related to both self-promotion and anti-social behaviors on Facebook (Carpenter, 2012). Another study produced a correlation showing that individuals that score higher on a narcissism scale yet lower on a self-esteem scale were prone to greater online activity (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Conversely, one study conducted both in Germany and the United States resulted in a conclusion that the effect of narcissism on status updating on Facebook activity is not substantial enough for valid measures (große Deters, Mehl, & Eid, 2014). This study confirmed that the users of social networking sites believed that narcissism predicts status updates.

There are mixed findings about the higher rate of narcissism and social media. Some studies have shown that couples who use Facebook extensively are more likely to cheat, break up, and divorce. Teenagers who are inclined to high Facebook usage have shown signs of behavioral problems, excessive vanity, aggression, anti-social tendencies, and poorer academic performance than their peers. Some studies show Facebook usage encourages people to keep up with the Joneses and promotes rivalry, boasting, envy, and more undesirable personality traits.

However, a few studies have proven that Facebook usage promotes a greater self-awareness, offers us a more positive version of ourselves, and even some go so far as to say that a new definition of narcissism needs to be developed, as the current definition is now our social norm (Williams, 2013).

The researchers found no significant correlations in the data to support a hypothesis that narcissistic individuals are more likely to utilize Facebook in any manner that was more grandiose than the rest of us. In fact, it appeared—however slightly and certainly only anecdotally—a few participants that scored significantly higher on the NPI-16 indicated that they used Facebook quite a bit less than the others.

Limitations. Several limitations to this study could be addressed in future approaches to the subject matter. The participant pool was limited to students within a single university. As such, the age range of most participants was under 21 (74%) which limits the responses. A broader response base would enlarge the reporting numbers to provide a better look at this phenomenon. Also, there were nearly four times as many female participants as male participants. This could influence the reporting of Facebook habits, specifically, but also since traditionally females are far more correlated with Borderline Personality Disorder traits than Narcissistic Personality Traits, this could have an impact on those results.

Conclusions. Despite the limitations, this study concluded like several before it, that Facebook habits and narcissistic traits are not correlated.

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