Why narcissists are at risk for developing Facebook addiction: The need to be admired and the need to belong

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The association between GN and FB addiction levels was mediated by the need for admiration
- The association between GN and FB addiction levels was mediated by the need to belong.
- VN was not found to be associated either directly or indirectly with Fb addiction levels.
- The variables in the model accounted for 30% of the variance in Fb addiction levels.

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ABSTRACT

Building upon previous research establishing a positive association between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and problematic social networking use, the present study tests a model that explains how grandiose and vulnerable narcissists might develop Facebook (Fb) addiction symptoms through the need for admiration and the need to belong. A sample of 535 undergraduates (50.08% F; mean age 22.70 ± 2.76 years) completed measures of grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, Fb addiction symptoms, and two brief scales measuring the need for admiration and the need to belong. Results from structural equation modelling show that the association between grandiose narcissism and Fb addiction levels was completely mediated by the need for admiration and the need to belong. On the other hand, vulnerable narcissism was not found to be associated either directly or indirectly with Fb addiction levels. The variables in the model accounted for 30% of the variance in Fb addiction levels. The present study represents a step toward a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the link between grandiose narcissism and problematic Fb use.

1. Narcissists and social networking sites

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become one of the primary venues where people interact with each other, especially among youth. This has attracted considerable scientific attention, much of it devoted to investigating relationships between psychological traits and the use of such sites (e.g., Hong, Chen, & Li, 2017; Wang, Ho, Chan, & Tse, 2015). Research on narcissism has been especially popular in recent years (see, for example, Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearrington, 2014; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013), with special emphasis placed on the hypothesis that SNSs are ideal environments for achieving narcissistic goals. A recent meta-analysis (Liu & Baumeister, 2016) has shown that there is a positive association between grandiose narcissism and the total number of Facebook (Fb) friends, as well as how often users update their statuses, upload attractive photos, and interact with each

other. Evidence has also suggested the tendency among narcissists to promote their own content (Carpenter, 2012) and to attract admiring friends to their own Fb profiles (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Similar research has shown that grandiose narcissists tend to update their status for self-presentation purposes more frequently than do non-narcissists (Bergman et al., 2011; Carpenter, 2012; Davenport et al., 2014), often in an attempt to compensate for, or regulate, their self-image (Eşkisu, Hoşoğlu, & Rasmussen, 2017).

Most studies that have looked into the association between narcissism and SNSs have focused on the grandiose form of narcissism. However, some studies (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1996) have documented the existence of two particular subtypes of narcissism: *grandiose and vulnerable*. The grandiose type, also referred to as "overt" narcissism, is characterized by the search for admiration, high self-esteem, direct expression of exhibitionism, and arrogance (Miller & Campbell, 2008; Wink, 1996). It also features traits related to

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dominance, grandiosity, and aggression. Conversely, vulnerable narcissism, or "covert" and "hypersensitive" narcissism, is characterized by a defensive and insecure sense of grandiosity that is associated with low self-esteem, shame-proneness, shyness, and hypersensitivity to the evaluation of others (Pincus & Roche, 2011). The few studies that have considered the distinction between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism in the study of SNS use have found that vulnerable narcissists are more interested in establishing and controlling their privacy than grandiose narcissists (Ahn, Kwolek, & Bowman, 2015), even though both types of narcissists are more interested in using online social platforms for self-presentation purposes than non-narcissists. This was revealed, for example, by the tendency among narcissists to include more personal photos on their Fb pages (Marshall, Lefringhausen, & Ferenczi, 2015).

Since SNSs have a number of characteristics that might be useful in achieving narcissistic goals, some scholars (e.g., Ksinan & Vazsonyi, 2016) have recently begun arguing that high levels of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic traits can lead to a problematic use of SNSs (e.g. deficient self-regulation), and produce a host of negative outcomes. Four previous studies (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017; Casale, Fioravanti, & Rugai, 2016; Ksinan & Vazsonyi, 2016; Taylor & Strutton, 2016) have investigated the association between narcissism and problematic SNS use. By focusing on grandiose narcissism, Taylor and Strutton (2016) found a positive correlation between narcissism and Fb addiction. This link has been confirmed by Andreassen et al. (2017), who considered a wider scope of SNSs (e.g. Fb, Twitter, and Instagram) in their research. The few studies that have distinguished between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism have found a different pattern of results. For instance, Ksinan and Vazsonyi (2016) found that vulnerable narcissists — but not people with grandiose narcissism — show a preference for online social interactions (i.e., a belief to be safer, more comfortable, and more efficacious in computer mediated communication than in face-to-face interactions; Caplan, 2003). Building on this study, Casale et al. (2016) found that vulnerable narcissists are more likely than grandiose narcissists to use SNSs compulsively in order to regulate negative feelings. Grandiose narcissists occupied an intermediate position between vulnerable narcissists and non-narcissists, in terms of their tendency to use SNSs to regulate negative feelings, their inability to control one's own use of SNSs, and the negative outcomes that arise from their use of SNSs. Even if the cross-sectional design of these studies fails to clarify the direction of this association, these findings suggest that the relation between the two forms of narcissism and problematic SNS use deserves further attention.

1.1. Explaining the association between narcissism and problematic SNS use: the uses and gratifications theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U & G; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) is a psychological communication perspective that examines how individuals use mass media. This perspective emphasizes what people do with media by conceiving of the audience as goal-directed, and oftentimes in response to specific needs. These needs are expressed as motives for adopting the use of a particular medium, and are connected to the social and psychological disposition of the individual. If an individual perceives that a certain medium fulfils a particular need, then he or she will attach more relevance to this medium. A seminal study by Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) found that television use was associated with entertainment needs, while newspapers were associated with information needs, thereby offering support for the idea that media preferences fulfil distinct audience needs. U & G has also been used to understand how individuals employ the Internet to meet different goals based on their socio-psychological disposition. In keeping with this perspective, a growing consensus has emerged that "online media serve as functional alternatives to interpersonal and mediated communication, providing options or complements for aspects of an individual's environment that are not as fulfilling" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; p. 214). This, in

turn, might lead some Internet users to lose control over their behavior, which was originally motivated by attempts to satisfy unmet needs (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Given the unique features of the U & G perspective and the previous evidence showing that narcissists might be at risk for developing Fb addiction, it is important to explore the specific needs underlying the use of Fb among narcissists.

1.1.1. The need for admiration as a possible mediator in the relationship between narcissism and Facebook addiction

Various attributes of SNSs make them seem like an ideal tool for satisfying narcissistic needs. First, SNSs provide greater control over self-presentation, compared to face-to-face interactions, making them a useful venue for the deployment of strategic interpersonal behaviors, many of which are used by narcissists to construct and maintain a carefully considered self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Second, social media use allows individuals to express their ambitions, and advertise their successes to a large audience, while also obtaining highly visible rewards and recognition through "likes" and positive comments from other social media users (Andreassen et al., 2017). Fb, in particular, can be an ideal tool for self-promotion (Panek et al., 2013), as users can frequently post status updates, comments, or photos of themselves, and expect timely and frequent positive feedback. Moreover, given the rise of SNS use on mobile devices, SNSs are accessible at all times and in all places. This implies that narcissists can both curate, manage, and promote an online "self" throughout the day, and get frequent feedback on their efforts. Various features of SNSs have led many researchers in this field (e.g., Bergman et al., 2011; Brailovskaia & Bierhoff, 2016) to speculate that the need for admiration is the primary causal mechanism in explaining why narcissists tend to promote their own content and upload attractive photos more than non-narcissists. Similarly, researchers who have found significant associations between narcissism and problematic SNS use have speculated that individuals with elevated narcissistic traits might report a compulsive use of social media, because SNSs are an ideal environment in achieving the narcissistic goal to be considered superior, unique, and special (Andreassen et al., 2017; Casale et al., 2016; Taylor & Strutton, 2016).

Interestingly, the idea that the association between narcissism and SNS use/abuse is mediated by the need for admiration has never been empirically tested. This is curious because the association between narcissism and peculiar SNS use (including compulsive use) has been well-established and theoretically supported (Andreassen et al., 2017; Casale et al., 2016). This study is a first attempt to fill this gap by investigating the mediating role of the need for admiration in the association between two forms of narcissism and problematic use of Fb.

1.1.2. The need to belong as a possible mediator in the relationship between narcissism and Facebook addiction

The need to be admired might not be the only factor in explaining a positive association between the two forms of narcissism and compulsive SNS use. SNSs provide users with several ways to interact—-whether in private or public, individually or collectively. Fb, in particular, has a number of features facilitating interaction between a user and his or her community of friends. The friend request process in Fb is a reciprocal one; if a user accepts a request to join another's network, then that user automatically joins the requester's network. Nadkarni and Hofmann (2011) propose that the widespread use of Fb might be motivated not only by the universal need for self-presentation, but also by the fundamental human motivation to belong—an intrinsic drive to affiliate with others. Indeed, one of the first studies to examine the uses and gratifications of SNSs reported that the primary motivations for Fb use were to form and maintain social connections (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Subsequent empirical evidence has confirmed that this is a fundamental drive among Fb users. For example, Sheldon, Abad, and Hirsch (2011) found that the frequency of Fb use was positively correlated with feelings of general disconnection in life and mediated by the tendency to cope with disconnection via Fb.