



## Full length article

## A study of the relationship between narcissism, extraversion, drive for entertainment, and narcissistic behavior on social networking sites



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## ABSTRACT

As social networking sites are gaining popularity, the rise in narcissistic culture on these sites are also documented. Literature suggests users' personality traits may be important factors leading people to engage in narcissistic behaviors. Using a national sample of Chinese adults, this study investigated the relationship between narcissism, extraversion, drive for entertainment and narcissistic behaviors on a Chinese social networking site, Wechat Moment. We also examined whether demographic variables and online time played a role in that dynamic. Results revealed that narcissism predicted exhibitionistic behaviors on Wechat Moment, ratings of one's profile picture and using an image of oneself as profile picture over and above extraversion and drive for entertainment controlling for online time and demographic variables. Contrary to our hypothesis, narcissism did not predict higher frequency of Wechat Moment posting over and above drive for entertainment and extraversion. Different sub-factors of narcissism also contributed differently to the variance of narcissistic behavior on SNS.

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## 1. Introduction

The widespread use of social networking sites (SNS) and the rise of a narcissistic online culture have been documented in recent years (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Ong et al., 2011; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Showing off has replaced the original goals of some activities. For some the aim of travel has become the taking and sharing of pictures on SNS, rather than having a memorable experience or exploring. Instead of eating food in a restaurant as soon as it is brought to us, some of us first serve the food to our SNS audience. Taking pictures of ourselves, then modifying those pictures and sharing them on SNS has become a routine social networking activity for some people (Fox & Rooney, 2015). Checking whether people have "liked" our posts or commented on our posts are also routines for some. How should we interpret narcissistic behavior on SNS?

An often-cited datum about narcissism is that although 30%–40% of our face-to-face communication relates to our own experiences (Landis & Burt, 1924), around 80% of social media communication (such as Twitter) is self-related (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010). Why is narcissistic behavior more frequent on SNS than in face-to-face interactions? Are we more narcissistic on SNS than on a

face-to-face basis? Most previous studies used narcissism as a sole predictor of narcissistic behavior on SNS (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008), but narcissism only explained a small proportion of the variance in narcissistic behavior (e.g., Ong et al., 2011; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013). One explanation for this is that there are other variables, besides narcissistic personality, which also contribute to the variance in the narcissistic behavior on SNS. Narcissistic behavior on SNS may be motivated by other reasons other than narcissism. Extraversion has been found to predict narcissistic behavior on Facebook (Ong et al., 2011). This study hypothesizes that drive for entertainment also predicts narcissistic behavior on SNS.

We investigated this hypothesis by examining narcissistic behavior on one of China's largest social networking sites, Wechat Moment. Wechat is an instant messaging application used on over 90% of smart phones used in China and it had 549 million active users per month in the first quarter of 2015 (Curiosity China, 2015; June, 8). Wechat Moment is a social networking site built on the Wechat software. Despite its popularity, few studies have studied narcissistic behavior on this Chinese social media. This study shall fill in the gap and explore what predicts narcissistic behavior on this Chinese SNS. Specifically, this study explores the relationship between narcissism, extraversion, drive for entertainment and narcissistic behavior on SNS.

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### 1.1. Narcissism and narcissistic behavior on SNS

Social networking sites by design are great venues for exhibitionism (Bumgarner, 2007). Users of SNS have full control over the information they disclose and can be strategic about their verbal and pictorial self-presentation than in face-to-face communication (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Kramer & Winter 2008). This makes SNS the perfect platform for narcissists.

Narcissists are typically characterized as individuals with a highly inflated, unrealistic, positive self-concept, who constantly seek veneration from others and whose thoughts and behavior are self-centered (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). As is generally the case for personality constructs, narcissism tends to occur along a continuum in the general population.

Narcissism is also multi-dimensional in nature. Several studies have demonstrated that narcissistic behavior and thought consist of multiple discrete components (Ackerman et al., 2011; Emmons, 1984; Kansi, 2003). Raskin and Terry (1988) developed a 40-item index called narcissism personality index (NPI) that measured seven components of narcissism: authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, vanity, and entitlement. Other versions involve four components (Emmons, 1984; Kansi, 2003) or three components (Ackerman et al., 2011). For this study we adopted Kansi (2003)'s four-component index because it was developed using samples from a general population similar to that from which our sample was drawn, whereas other indexes are based on student samples. Kansi (2003)'s 29-item scale included four components: Leadership/Power (i.e., feeling like a leader), Exhibitionism/Self-admiration (i.e., showing off), Superiority/Arrogance (i.e., feeling better than others), and Uniqueness/Entitlement (i.e., believing that one deserves the best).

Most previous studies of narcissism and SNS use treated narcissism as a one-dimensional construct (Bergman et al., 2011; Ong et al., 2011), although there have been some exceptions (Carpenter, 2012; Panek et al., 2013). Panek et al. (2013) found that posting on Twitter was correlated with the superiority component of narcissism whereas posting on Facebook was correlated with the exhibitionism component of narcissism among college students. Using Ackerman et al. (2011)'s three-component conceptualization of narcissism: leadership/authority, grandiose exhibitionism, and entitlement/exploitativeness, Carpenter (2012) found the grandiose exhibitionism component strongly predicted self-promoting behaviors including posting status updates and posting photos of one's self on Facebook, while the entitlement/exploitativeness component partially predicted anti-social behaviors, such as responding to negative comments.

These findings suggest that the exhibitionism component of narcissism is most closely related to the self-enhancing presentation on SNS. Narcissists are attention seeking. They are very concerned about their physical appearances (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008) and overestimate their physical attractiveness (Bleske-Rechek, Remiker, & Baker, 2008; Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994). It is not surprising that narcissism predicted higher self-ratings of Facebook profile picture over and above extraversion (Ong et al., 2011). Based on this finding, we predict that narcissism predicts ratings of one's profile picture on Wechat Moment as well.

Using an image of oneself as one's profile picture on SNS might be an indication of inflated self-confidence. Narcissists love to look at themselves in the mirror (Kansi, 2003) and using an image of oneself as a profile picture serves the same function as looking at oneself in the mirror; it may also be considered as a form of showing off. Therefore we hypothesize that narcissism predicts using an image of oneself as a profile picture.

Narcissists put a lot of effort into their clothes and makeup in order to appear attractive (Vazire et al., 2008). This effort helps to confirm them in their illusions of their own attractiveness (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2008; Gabriel et al., 1994). It is easier to enhance one's self-image on SNS than in real life. Modern picture-editing software has made it easy to alter online images. The popularity of picture editing can be gauged from the number of downloads of one of the most popular photo-editing applications in China, Meitu. Meitu app has been downloaded over 1.2 billion times on 750 million mobile devices by 2015 (Huang, 2015; July, 22). It has been shown that in the USA narcissism is positively related to the frequency of photo-editing on SNS (Fox & Rooney, 2015) and we predict that the same associations would be observed with respect to editing of pictures in the Chinese social networking site, Wechat Moment.

The exhibitionism component of narcissism encompasses an element of showing off one's life. Narcissists believe that everybody is interested in their lives and likes hearing their stories (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Sharing every bit of one's life, especially the positive bits, is now common on SNS - having a fancy dinner, getting a new haircut, going for a trip, etc. - almost anything to do with one's life is worth sharing with friends on SNS. In many cases showing off has replaced the original goals of the activity. We predict that narcissism is positively related to uploading pictures of one's dinner and travel experiences.

Taking selfies and displaying them on SNS is another popular form of narcissism. The prevalence of smartphones and other small, affordable photographic devices has enabled many people to take pictures of themselves from one arm's length; these pictures are called selfies, or ego shots (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). Most studies have found a positive relationship between narcissism and posting selfies on SNS (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Mullen-Cooper, 2014; Weiser, 2015) with a few exceptions. Sorokowski et al. (2015) found that whilst women posted more selfies on SNS than men, narcissism was only associated with selfie-posting on SNS in men. Reed (2015) found no relationship between narcissism and the posting of selfies on Instagram. These discrepant findings notwithstanding we predict that narcissism would be positively related to selfie posting frequency, based on the majority finding.

Narcissists need constant external self-affirmation as they are unable to regulate their own self-esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Self-affirmation can easily be obtained on SNS by posting and then waiting for the post to be liked or commented on. Ford's 2014 trend report stated that 62% of American adults said they felt better about themselves when others reacted positively to their posts on social media (Gara, 2013; Dec, 17). Based on this evidence we predicted that narcissism is positively related to the frequency with which individuals check the comments on their social media posts.

In summary, we predict that narcissism is positively related to exhibitionistic behavior on SNS, including selfies posting, uploading pictures of one's meals and travel experiences, editing pictures before uploading them to SNS and the checking comments on one's posts. Because all these behaviors were measured in terms of frequency, they can be combined into a single variable, exhibitionistic behavior. Other narcissistic behaviors, including high rating of one's profile picture and using an image of oneself as a profile picture, were also predicted to be positively related to narcissism.

Frequency of SNS posting is another indicator of showing off. Narcissism has been found to be positively related to Facebook posting frequency (Ong et al., 2011; Panek et al., 2013) and based on this we predicted that narcissism would be positively related to Wechat Moment posting frequency.

Besides narcissism, extraversion and drive for entertainment have also been found to be related to SNS use, which may explain why narcissistic behavior is common on SNS. Below I shall review

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