



Narcissism and self-esteem as predictors of dimensions of Facebook use



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 April 2015

Received in revised form 5 November 2015

Accepted 12 November 2015

Available online 25 November 2015

Keywords:

Facebook usage

Narcissism

Self-esteem

Facebook personal importance

Facebook intensity

ABSTRACT

The present paper examines whether narcissism and self-esteem are related to different patterns of Facebook use. The Facebook Motivation and Importance Scale, the Facebook Intensity Scale, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, and the Self-Esteem Scale were used. The participants in the paper-and-pencil study were 653 Polish users of Facebook. We hypothesized that narcissism and self-esteem play a significant role in Facebook use. The results showed that self-esteem and narcissism can be predictors of Facebook personal importance. The study is the first attempt to explore the role of psychological predictors of Facebook use in Poland.

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, Facebook has become the number one social networking site (SNS), known mainly as a communication tool, especially among young people (Ellison et al., 2007). In September 2014 an average of 864 million people used Facebook daily (Facebook, 2014). There are two important areas of Facebook research: the motivation behind its use and the personality of users (Błachnio et al., 2013).

In several of articles reviewed by Wilson et al. (2012) motivation for using Facebook was a key area of investigation. For instance, Park et al. (2009) indicated four reasons for using Facebook: socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information seeking. Facebook use is connected with creating or maintaining social capital (e.g., Ellison et al., 2007; Johnston et al., 2013). Park and Lee (2014) found that entertainment, relationship maintenance, self-expression, and communication were associated with Facebook intensity, the entertainment motivation being the most influential. Impression management was found to be a significant predictor for Facebook intensity, whereas professional use was not related to it. Facebook intensity was a predictor of the sense of belonging. The dual-factor model of Facebook use proposed by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) points to two basic social needs: (1) the need to belong and (2) the need for self-presentation, which can separately or jointly lead to Facebook use. The model links these two needs with other variables, such as narcissism or self-esteem, but, unfortunately, it has not yet been empirically verified (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

The second group of studies pertains to the relationship between Facebook use and users' personality. There have been several studies exploring the relationship between Facebook use and the Big Five personality traits (Seidman, 2013; Hughes et al., 2012), shyness (Ross et al., 2009), depression (Błachnio et al., in press), or loneliness (Ryan & Xenos, 2011). However, studies focusing on both narcissism and self-esteem simultaneously and on the relationship of these variables with Facebook use are scarce (e.g., Marshall et al., 2015; Skues et al., 2012). The present study is meant to yield integrated knowledge on these interrelations.

1.1. Narcissism and Facebook use

Narcissism is a personality trait that manifests itself in an infatuation and obsession with oneself and in an aspiration to attain self-gratification, achieve dominance, and satisfy ambition (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Since one of the main advantages of Facebook is the possibility of promoting oneself, disclosing private information, presenting oneself in a better light, and creating a positive or even idealistic lifestyle (Błachnio et al., 2013), a narcissistic user may use the available Facebook applications to make others admire him or her (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). This explanation is even more convincing when supported by other results. Previous studies confirmed that people with a high level of narcissism spent more time on Facebook during the day and during one session (Mehdizadeh, 2010) and that they were more socially active in the online community (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Other studies revealed that the level of narcissism was linked to differences in Facebook use; for example, a high level of narcissism correlated with frequent status updates (Ong et al., 2011), higher self-promotion (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Carpenter, 2012; Ryan & Xenos, 2011),

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specific photo selection (Kapidzic, 2013), or having a greater number of Facebook friends (Gentile et al., 2012). Some evidence indicates that a high level of narcissism can predict posting selfies on Facebook in the case of male users, but it was not significant in female users (Sorokowski et al., 2015). Even though many studies have supported the hypotheses that Facebook use is linked to narcissism, there have also been studies that did not confirm such effects in the case of the Millennials generation (Bergman et al., 2011) or Australian students (Skues et al., 2012). There is also an ongoing debate about whether Facebook – because of its functions – increases narcissism. The latest results obtained by Horton et al. (2014) suggest that the agentic (self-promotional) type of user activity facilitates narcissism to a greater degree than communal activity does. As the study by Marshall et al. (2015) showed, Facebook serves narcissists as a place for presenting their accomplishments in order to receive as many likes and comments as possible. Since the results of previous studies suggest that the relationship between narcissism and Facebook usage is complex and ambiguous in various populations, we propose to investigate this relationship further.

1.2. Self-esteem and Facebook use

Self-esteem is understood as a global evaluation of oneself. It is a positive or negative attitude towards oneself (Rosenberg, 1989). There is plenty of evidence concerning the relationships of emotional functioning and personality with narcissism (Laguna et al., 2007). Since people with low self-esteem are shy and reserved and experience high social anxiety (Robins et al., 2001), they may treat Facebook as a comfortable way to overcome these problems and stay connected. It is likely that Facebook gives users with low self-esteem the opportunity to disclose private information about themselves and to express themselves better than in the real world. Moreover, a high level of social anxiety may be related to the sense of loneliness, which also predicts the disclosure of private information on Facebook (Blachnio et al., in press).

We wanted to examine how self-esteem is related to different aspect of Facebook use: Facebook importance, Facebook intensity, instrumental Facebook use, and social Facebook use, and whether there are any differences between users with low vs high self-esteem. Previous studies provided evidence of the beneficial impact of Facebook use through both social compensation and social enhancement mechanisms. Greater control over one's personal image and the potential that social media have for positive computer-mediated interaction leads to a greater number of friends and more time spent on Facebook by those who have lower self-esteem (Barker, 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012; Manago et al., 2012; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010; Valkenburg et al., 2006). The intense Facebook use may imply that for users with low self-esteem Facebook is of great importance. Thanks to Facebook those users may build their social capital and receive social support. This reasoning would be in line with the suggestion made by Schwartz (2010) that there is a negative relationship between the frequency of Facebook use, the meaning attributed to Facebook use, and self-esteem. In his the longitudinal study, self-esteem was a moderator of the relationship between Facebook usage intensity and bridging social capital. It means that for people with a low level of self-esteem Facebook use is more profitable as a means of bridging social capital than it is for those with a higher level of self-esteem. (Steinfeld et al., 2008). The study by Kalpidou et al. (2011) showed a negative association between self-esteem and time spent on Facebook. The authors concluded that Facebook played a beneficial role in the case of users with low self-esteem. Also, Lee et al. (2012) confirmed the mechanism of social compensatory friending in the form of having a large number of Facebook friends among people with a low level of self-esteem. More light was shed on this research topic by Zywicki and Danowski (2008), whose study supported the Social Enhancement (“Rich Get Richer”) and Social Compensation (“Poor Get Richer”) hypotheses. Facebook can play a compensative role for those who have low self-esteem.

Facebook users who were high on extraversion and self-esteem derived some benefits from using Facebook: they were popular both in the real world and on Facebook, whereas more introverted Facebook users, with low self-esteem, benefited from using that site as well, for instance by receiving a great deal of social support.

In order to better explain Facebook use, it is necessary to integrate personality characteristics and motivation in one model. This was done, for instance, in the study by Senol-Durak and Durak (2011), who explored the relationship between individual variables such as self-esteem or affectivity and problematic Internet use cognitions. Based on a bulk of research stressing the strong bonds between personality and Facebook use, in our model we present the associations between users' personality and Facebook use dimensions.

The present study has a manifold purpose. Firstly, it is an attempt to add to the body of research an in-depth analysis of motivation for using Facebook in relation to personality traits. Secondly, it refines the existing research on the influence of narcissism and self-esteem on Facebook use, which sometimes yielded ambiguous results (Yu et al., 2010). Moreover, although there has been an increase in the number of studies focused on the relationship of narcissism and self-esteem with Facebook use, a majority of them were conducted in the USA, Asia, or Australia. Considering the cultural and sociodemographic differences in Facebook use indicated in several studies (e.g., Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012), it is worth examining the above relationships in Central Europe, where Facebook use has not been explored yet.

In our study, we included four dependent variables related to Facebook use: Facebook importance, Facebook instrumental use, social Facebook use, and Facebook intensity. This seems to be a novel approach and makes it possible to analyze this phenomenon broadly. Facebook importance reflects the attitude towards Facebook, the role it plays in a person's life, and the meaning the person attributes to using it. Social Facebook use emphasizes the role of being connected and socializing with others. Instrumental Facebook use refers to the standard use of Facebook and its applications in everyday life. Facebook intensity comprises the time spent on Facebook and the number of Facebook friends as well as emotional connectedness.

On the basis of the literature review, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H1: Narcissism is positively related to Facebook personal importance (1a), instrumental Facebook use (1b), social Facebook use (1c), and Facebook intensity (1d).

H2: Self-esteem is negatively related to Facebook personal importance (2a), to Facebook intensity (2b), and to social Facebook use (2c), and positively to instrumental Facebook use (2d).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The participants were a sample of 653 adults; 73% of them were women. The mean age was 21.63 years ($SD = 2.62$), with the age ranging from 18 to 39. Participants were recruited at several universities in Poland and volunteered to take part in the study without any monetary reward. They were recruited individually using the snowball procedure. They were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the anonymity of the research. All participants reported that they had a profile on Facebook. They completed a paper-and-pencil survey.

2.1.1. Measures

The Facebook Motivation and Importance Scale, developed for the purpose of the study, consists of 21 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*): 13 items concerning Facebook personal importance were developed for the study – eight items, focusing on motivation to use Facebook, were generated on the basis of the list of Facebook use motives presented by Hew (2011) and by Brandtzaeg and Heim (2009). The principal component factor analysis

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