

A Correlational Study on Social Media Usage and Narcissistic Personality Traits Among Young Adults

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Abstract: *In the contemporary digital age, social media has become deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life, particularly among young adults. The architecture of these platforms inherently rewards self-presentation and engagement, creating environments where users are incentivized to project idealized versions of themselves. This study investigates the correlational relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults aged 18 to 25 years in the Indian context. Employing a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 50 young adults selected through convenience sampling. Social media usage was assessed using a self-structured Social Media Usage Questionnaire, while narcissistic traits were measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16). Descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation were utilized for data analysis. Findings indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits ($r = 0.42, p < .01$), indicating that higher engagement on social media platforms is associated with elevated narcissistic tendencies. The study contributes to the limited body of literature exploring this intersection within non-Western, South Asian contexts. Implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers regarding digital wellness and mindful online behavior are discussed.*

Keywords: Social Media Usage, Narcissistic Personality Traits, NPI-16, Young Adults, Digital Psychology

1. Introduction

Psychological well-being and personality development in the digital era are profoundly influenced by the ubiquitous presence of social media. In the contemporary digital age, social media has become deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life, particularly among young adults. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have evolved beyond mere communication tools to become dynamic spaces for identity construction, self-expression, social interaction, and community building.

Young adulthood, broadly defined as the period between 18 and 25 years of age, is a crucial developmental stage characterised by significant transitions in personal identity, social roles, and psychological functioning. During this formative period, individuals are actively engaged in the process of identity formation, developing their self-concept, and seeking acceptance and validation from their social environment. The still-maturing nature of their psychological frameworks makes young adults particularly sensitive to external social feedback, peer comparisons, and the need for belonging and recognition.

Social media platforms have profoundly amplified these developmental dynamics by providing instant, quantifiable feedback mechanisms in the form of likes, comments, shares, and follower counts. The architecture of these platforms is inherently designed to reward self-presentation and engagement, creating environments where users are persistently incentivised to curate and project idealised versions of themselves. This continuous cycle of self-promotion, audience feedback, and social comparison may have far-reaching consequences on how young adults perceive themselves, relate to others, and regulate their emotions.

One psychological construct that has received growing scholarly attention in the context of social media is narcissism. Narcissism, as conceptualised within psychological research, is characterised by an inflated sense of self-importance, a pervasive need for admiration, a tendency toward grandiose self-presentation, and a relative lack of empathy for others. These traits, when present at subclinical levels, are referred to as narcissistic personality traits and are understood to exist on a continuum within the general population. The structural features of social media platforms closely mirror the behavioural and motivational patterns associated with narcissistic personality traits.

Given this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults. By generating empirical evidence on this association, the study seeks to contribute to the broader psychological understanding of how digital environments intersect with personality development in the Indian context, thereby broadening the cultural scope of the existing evidence base.

2. Literature Survey

The foundational work by Raskin and Terry [1] resulted in the development of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), which became one of the most widely employed instruments for measuring narcissistic traits in non-clinical populations. Recognising the practical need for a shorter measure, Ames, Rose, and Anderson [2] developed the NPI-16, a streamlined version comprising 16 forced-choice items. The NPI-16 retains strong psychometric properties, making it particularly well-suited for large-scale surveys.

With the proliferation of social networking sites, researchers began exploring the intersection of narcissism and online

behaviour. Buffardi and Campbell [3] demonstrated that narcissistic individuals tend to construct highly curated, self-promotional profiles. Mehdizadeh [4] found that individuals with higher narcissism scores spent significantly more time on Facebook. Similarly, research by Panek, Nardis, and Konrath [5] found that for younger users, social media usage was closely associated with narcissism as a form of public self-promotion.

Despite evidence from Western contexts, there is a relative paucity of research in South Asian settings, where cultural values around self-presentation differ substantially. The present study seeks to contribute to this underexplored area by examining this relationship within the Indian context.

3. Problem Definition

While a positive association between social media use and narcissistic traits is well documented in Western populations, it remains unclear whether this relationship holds within the Indian cultural context, where collectivist norms around modesty may moderate self-presentation behaviour. This study addresses that gap by empirically testing the following objectives and hypotheses.

4. Objectives

- 1) To examine the nature and strength of the relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults aged 18 to 25 years.
- 2) To assess and quantify the extent of social media usage among the sample population.
- 3) To evaluate the degree of narcissistic personality traits present within the sample using the NPI-16.
- 4) To categorise participants based on their levels of social media engagement and narcissistic tendencies.

Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults.

5. Methodology/ Approach

Research Design and Participants: The present study adopts a quantitative correlational research design. The sample comprises 50 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years who are active users of at least one social media platform, recruited through convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to be within the specified age range and regular social media users for a minimum of six months.

Measures: Social media usage was assessed with a self-structured Social Media Usage Questionnaire covering frequency of daily use, duration per session, range of platforms, and types of activities, measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Narcissistic traits were measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16) [2], comprising 16 paired forced-choice statements, with total

scores ranging from 0 to 16 and classified into low (0–5), moderate (6–10), and high (11–16) narcissism.

Procedure: Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered via online forms and physical distribution. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) were calculated. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

6. Results & Discussion

Descriptive findings indicated that the sample exhibited moderate to high levels of social media engagement ($M = 34.62$, $SD = 7.45$). For narcissistic traits, the mean NPI-16 score was 7.84 ($SD = 3.21$), with the majority of participants falling into the low-to-moderate narcissism categories, and 18% scoring in the high narcissism category.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N = 50)

Variable	Description
Age Range	18 – 25 years
Gender	Male (48%), Female (52%)
Daily SM Usage	$M = 3.4$ hours, $SD = 1.2$
Primary Platform	Instagram (56%), YouTube (24%), Others (20%)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Social Media Usage	34.62	7.45	Moderate-High
NPI-16 Score	7.84	3.21	Moderate

Table 3: Correlation Matrix (Pearson r)

Variables	1	2
1. Social Media Usage	1	
2. NPI-16 Score	0.42**	1

Note: ** $p < .01$

Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

The findings align with the existing body of literature documenting a positive relationship between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits. Social media platforms are fundamentally structured to reward self-presentation. For individuals with narcissistic tendencies, this reward structure validates their grandiose self-perceptions and provides a continuous stream of admiration.

Conversely, habitual use of social media may gradually shape and reinforce narcissistic orientations in individuals who do not initially exhibit strong narcissistic tendencies. The cultural context of the study warrants consideration; in India, social norms around modesty and collectivism have historically mitigated the overt expression of self-aggrandising behaviours. The significant correlation found suggests that the digital environment's pull toward self-

presentation may be overriding traditional cultural moderators among young Indian adults.

Strengths and Limitations: Strengths include the use of a validated instrument (NPI-16) and focus on an under-researched cultural context. Limitations include the sample size of 50 recruited through convenience sampling, reliance on self-report measures susceptible to bias, and the cross-sectional design which precludes causal inferences.

7. Conclusion

The present study confirmed a statistically significant positive correlation between social media usage and narcissistic personality traits among young adults. This finding underscores the importance of integrating considerations of digital behaviour into psychological research on personality development. The study holds practical relevance for the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting healthier patterns of social media engagement, fostering greater self-awareness, digital literacy, and emotional resilience.

8. Future Scope

- 1) Future studies should employ larger, diverse samples through stratified random sampling and longitudinal designs to disentangle the direction of causality. Comparative studies across Eastern and Western populations are recommended.
- 2) Mental health practitioners should consider assessing social media habits when treating young adults, and educational institutions should implement digital wellness programmes.
- 3) Future work should employ multimethod approaches, supplementing self-reports with objective platform analytics to reduce response bias.

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