



Social networking website addiction and level of Narcissism in college students a correlational study

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social networking websites has significantly influenced the daily lives, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions of college students. While these platforms provide opportunities for communication and self-expression, excessive use may lead to addictive patterns. At the same time, personality traits such as narcissism, characterized by self-focus and a strong need for admiration, may shape individuals' online behavior. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social networking website addiction and narcissism among college students, along with gender differences in these variables.

A sample of 60 college students aged between 18 and 30 years participated in the study. Standardized tools, namely the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-14), were used to collect data. Statistical analysis using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation revealed no significant gender differences in either narcissism or social networking website addiction. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between the two variables. The findings suggest that social media addiction and narcissism operate as independent constructs among college students.

Keywords: Social networking website addiction, narcissism, college students, social media use, personality traits, correlational study

Introduction

In today's digital era, social networking websites have become an integral part of students' lives, influencing how they communicate, interact, and construct their identities. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter provide individuals with opportunities for self-expression, social validation, and connection. However, excessive engagement with these platforms may result in compulsive usage patterns, often described as social networking website addiction.

Alongside this behavioral concern, narcissism has gained increasing attention as a personality trait that may influence online behavior. Narcissistic individuals tend to seek attention, admiration, and validation, which can be easily obtained through social media platforms. These platforms offer an environment where users can curate their self-image and receive immediate feedback in the form of likes and comments.

Despite theoretical assumptions suggesting a link between narcissism and social media use, it remains unclear whether excessive use directly contributes to narcissistic tendencies. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the relationship between these two constructs among college students using a correlational research design.

Significance

This study holds importance in understanding the psychological implications of social media usage among young adults. As social networking websites continue to dominate daily life, it becomes essential to examine whether such usage influences personality traits. The findings of this study contribute to existing literature by clarifying the relationship between behavioral addiction and personality characteristics. Additionally, the study provides insights that

can be useful for developing awareness programs, counselling strategies, and interventions aimed at promoting healthy digital habits among students.

Objectives

To examine the difference in males and females with the perceived narcissism traits. To examine the difference in male and females with perceived social networking website addiction.

To examine the relationship between social networking website addiction and narcissism.

Rationale

The increasing dependence on social networking websites among college students raises concerns about its psychological consequences. At the same time, traits such as narcissism appear to be increasingly visible in online environments where self-presentation and validation are prominent. Although previous studies have examined these variables separately, limited research has focused on their relationship within the Indian context. This study was conducted to address this gap and to understand whether excessive use of social networking websites is associated with narcissistic tendencies.

Review of Literature

The concepts of social networking website addiction and narcissism have been widely explored in psychological research, particularly in relation to young adults and college students. Social networking website addiction refers to excessive and uncontrolled use of online platforms that interferes with daily functioning, while narcissism is understood as a personality trait involving self-focus, a need for admiration, and a sense of superiority.

One of the earliest contributions to the understanding of problematic internet use was made by Young (1998) [16], who conceptualized excessive internet usage as a behavioral addiction. The study highlighted symptoms such as loss of control, withdrawal, and negative consequences in academic and social domains. Building on this, Griffiths (2000) [17] proposed a components model of addiction, identifying key features such as salience, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse, which are also applicable to social networking addiction.

From a cognitive perspective, Davis (2001) [18] suggested that problematic internet use develops due to maladaptive thought patterns and emotional vulnerabilities. Similarly, Caplan (2002) [19] emphasized that individuals with poor offline social skills or social anxiety tend to prefer online communication, increasing the likelihood of excessive usage. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003) [20] further found that problematic internet users often experience loneliness, poor academic performance, and emotional distress.

Kraut *et al.* (2004) examined the broader social impact of internet use and suggested that excessive online interaction may reduce real-life social engagement, leading to feelings of isolation. In a similar vein, Leung (2004) [22] identified escapism and entertainment as major motivations behind excessive internet use, linking it to decreased productivity and well-being.

More recent studies have focused specifically on social networking addiction. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) [23] reviewed existing literature and concluded that social media addiction shares characteristics with other behavioral addictions and is associated with psychological issues such as anxiety and poor academic outcomes. Supporting this, Andreassen *et al.* (2012) [24] found that excessive use of social networking sites is significantly related to depression, low self-esteem, and emotional dependence. In the Indian context, Meena *et al.* (2012) [26] highlighted that problematic internet use among youth is associated with sleep disturbances, reduced concentration, and emotional difficulties.

Wilson *et al.* (2010) [25] identified psychological predictors such as low self-esteem and a high need for social validation as factors contributing to increased use of social networking sites. Similarly, Tang *et al.* (2014) found that loneliness and depression are strongly associated with social media addiction, suggesting that individuals may use online platforms as a coping mechanism. Andreassen (2015) [29] further conceptualized social media addiction as a behavioral pattern involving reinforcement, tolerance, and withdrawal, emphasizing its clinical relevance. Kuss *et al.* (2014) [30] also reported that excessive use of social networking sites is linked with psychological distress and difficulties in academic performance. With regard to narcissism, Raskin and Hall (1979) [1] developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, which enabled researchers to measure narcissistic traits in non-clinical populations. Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) later proposed a dynamic self-regulatory model, suggesting that narcissistic individuals continuously seek external validation to maintain an inflated self-image.

Campbell *et al.* (2002) [3] found that narcissistic individuals tend to have overly positive self-perceptions and a strong desire for admiration, which may lead to interpersonal difficulties. Paulhus and Williams (2002) [4] further

categorized narcissism as part of the “Dark Triad” of personality traits, highlighting its socially aversive characteristics such as lack of empathy and exploitative behavior.

Ames, Rose, and Anderson (2006) [5] introduced a shorter version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, making it easier to assess narcissism in large samples. Vazire and Funder (2006) [6] found that narcissistic individuals often create favorable first impressions but may later be perceived as self-centered and less likable. Campbell and Foster (2007) [7] explained that narcissistic individuals actively seek situations that enhance their self-image and provide opportunities for admiration.

Twenge *et al.* (2008) [8] suggested that levels of narcissism have increased over time among younger generations, possibly due to cultural shifts emphasizing self-expression and individual success. Buffardi and Campbell (2008) [9] found that narcissistic individuals engage in greater self-promotion on social networking websites. Similarly, Mehdizadeh (2010) [10] reported that individuals high in narcissism are more active in online self-presentation and tend to portray idealized versions of themselves.

Further research by Bergman *et al.* (2011) [11] indicated that narcissistic individuals may appear confident but are often sensitive to criticism. Ronningstam (2011) [12] emphasized that narcissism exists on a spectrum, ranging from healthy self-confidence to maladaptive traits. Ackerman *et al.* (2011) [13] highlighted both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of narcissism, such as leadership qualities alongside entitlement and exploitation. Gentile *et al.* (2012) [14] found that narcissistic individuals may react aggressively when their self-esteem is threatened. Back *et al.* (2013) observed that narcissistic individuals may initially appear socially successful but often struggle in long-term relationships. Overall, the literature suggests that both social networking website addiction and narcissism are complex constructs influenced by multiple psychological and social factors. While some studies indicate a possible connection between narcissism and online behavior, findings remain inconsistent. This highlights the need for further research to better understand the relationship between these variables, particularly among college students.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research on social networking website addiction and narcissism, most studies have examined these variables independently. There is a lack of research that systematically explores their relationship using standardized tools, particularly among Indian college students. This study attempts to fill this gap by adopting a correlational approach to examine the association between these variables.

Discussion

The results of the study indicated that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of narcissistic traits. This suggests that both genders exhibit similar levels of self-focus, need for admiration, and self-perception in the current social environment. This finding may reflect changing societal norms where opportunities for self-expression and validation are equally accessible to all individuals.

Similarly, the study found no significant gender differences in social networking website addiction. This indicates that

both male and female students engage with social media platforms at comparable levels. The widespread availability of smartphones and internet access has made social media a common part of daily life for all students, regardless of gender.

One of the most significant findings of the study is that there is no meaningful relationship between social networking website addiction and narcissism. This suggests that excessive use of social media does not necessarily result in increased narcissistic tendencies. While social media platforms may encourage self-presentation, individuals may use them for a variety of reasons, including communication, entertainment, academic purposes, and emotional expression.

These findings challenge the commonly held assumption that high social media usage leads to narcissistic behavior. Instead, they indicate that narcissism is a relatively stable personality trait that is not easily influenced by patterns of social media use. Other psychological factors such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social environment may play a more important role in shaping narcissistic tendencies.

Key Findings

The study revealed that there are no significant gender differences in narcissism or social networking website addiction. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between the two variables, indicating that they operate independently.

Future Implications

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of findings. It would also be beneficial to examine additional psychological variables such as self-esteem, anxiety, and emotional well-being. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how social media usage influences personality traits over time. Furthermore, educational institutions should focus on promoting awareness about healthy and balanced use of social media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that social networking website addiction and narcissism are independent constructs among college students. The findings indicate that excessive use of social media does not necessarily contribute to the development of narcissistic traits. Additionally, gender does not appear to influence either variable significantly. The study highlights the importance of adopting a balanced perspective when examining the psychological impact of social media and emphasizes the need for further research in this area.

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