# Narcissism on Facebook: Self-promotional and anti-social behavior

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

A survey ($N$ = 292) was conducted that measured self-promoting Facebook behaviors (e.g. posting status updates and photos of oneself, updating profile information) and several anti-social behaviors (e.g. seeking social support more than one provides it, getting angry when people do not comment on one's status updates, retaliating against negative comments). The grandiose exhibitionism subscale of the narcissistic personality inventory was hypothesized to predict the self-promoting behaviors. The entitlement/exploitativeness subscale was hypothesized to predict the anti-social behaviors. Results were largely consistent with the hypothesis for the self-promoting behaviors but mixed concerning the anti-social behaviors. Trait self-esteem was also related in the opposite manner as the Narcissism scales to some Facebook behaviors.

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## 1. Introduction

Facebook is one of the most popular websites in the world with over 600 million users (Ahmad, 2011). Those who use Facebook enjoy many benefits. Some college students use Facebook to seek and receive social support when they feel upset (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Wright, Craig, Cunningham, & Igiel, 2007). Toma and Hancock's (2011) recent experiments found when individuals are feeling distressed, they turn to Facebook to feel better. On the other hand, DeAndrea, Tong, and Walther (2011) argue that although online interaction provides opportunities for positive social interaction, some users abuse the affordances of social networking sites like Facebook to behave in anti-social ways. They argue that researchers need to move past seeking to determine if computer-mediated communication (CMC) has positive or negative effects as a whole but to determine why people use websites like Facebook in ways that promote or harm interpersonal relationships.

This study sought to take a step in that direction by examining one possible predictor of anti-social Facebook use: trait narcissism. The narcissistic personality type will first be briefly explicated. Then the existing research on the relationship between narcissism and Facebook use will be explored to develop hypotheses.

Investigating the relationship between narcissism and Facebook behavior is important because Facebook is becoming an increasingly important part of people's lives. Several researchers have found a relationship between narcissism and frequency of using Facebook (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ong

et al., 2011). Other researchers found that narcissism is associated with the number of friends their participants have on Facebook (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011). If these findings are accurate, it suggests that when people are interacting with others on Facebook, they are more likely to be interacting with individuals who are high in trait narcissism than in other contexts. If Facebook users are likely to be engaging in negative behaviors, the quality of the interpersonal interactions people experience on Facebook will be reduced. Furthermore, some research suggests that people are evaluated not just by their own profiles but by the comments others make on their profiles (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). The negative behavior of narcissists on Facebook may reflect poorly on the innocent friends of those narcissists. If the relationship between narcissism and various kinds of behaviors can be uncovered, perhaps interventions can be designed to improve the Facebook social skills of trait narcissists.

## 2. Narcissism

When they developed the narcissistic personality inventory (NPI), Raskin and Terry (1988) found a great deal of ambiguity in the personality literature concerning the primary aspects of narcissism. They therefore included a variety of heterogeneous traits in their conceptualization of narcissism. These included aspects such as "a grandiose sense of self-importance or uniqueness", "an inability to tolerate criticism", and "entitlement or the expectation of special favors without assuming reciprocal responsibilities" (p. 891).

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This definition covers a constellation of concepts and the NPI sought to measure all of them as aspects of a single personality trait.

In contrast, Ackerman et al. (2011) argue that the NPI is really measuring three different traits. They claim that one of the aspects of narcissism measured by the NPI is leadership ability and that aspect is often associated with positive interpersonal outcomes. The leadership aspects of narcissism were not the focus of this investigation as they are associated with pro-social behavior. On the other hand, they argue that the NPI also includes two other aspects of narcissism that they discovered drive the relationship between narcissism and anti-social behavior. These traits were the focus of this investigation.

Ackerman et al. (2011) labeled the first socially toxic element, "Grandiose Exhibitionism" (GE). This aspect of narcissism includes "self-absorption, vanity, superiority, and exhibitionistic tendencies" (p. 6). People who score high on this aspect of narcissism need to constantly be at the center of attention. They say shocking things and inappropriately self-disclose because they cannot stand to be ignored. They will take any opportunity to promote themselves. Simply gaining the interest and attention of others satisfies them.

Attention is not enough for those who possess the other negative aspect of narcissism labeled, "Entitlement/Exploitativeness" (EE). Ackerman et al. (2011) argue this aspect includes "a sense of deserving respect and a willingness to manipulate and take advantage of others" (p. 6). This tendency goes beyond the need for attention associated with GE as people high in this trait are those who will feel they deserve everything. More importantly, these people do not let the feelings and needs of others impede their goals. Ackerman et al. (2011) found that participants with higher EE scores were increasingly likely to have negative interactions reported by their roommate and their roommate was more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationship.

## 3. Narcissism and Facebook

Examination of the interpersonal possibilities offered by Facebook as well as the limited extant research suggests several tentative hypotheses about Facebook behaviors and the two aspects of narcissism under investigation. Initially, individuals who are high in GE will want to gain the attention of the widest audience possible (Ackerman et al., 2011). Therefore, they are predicted to have a high friend count given their drive to seek attention from as many people as possible. If they are seeking a wider audience, they are also predicted to accept friend requests from strangers because they would be seeking an audience rather than using Facebook to engage in social interaction with existing friends. They may also attempt to gain the attention of their audience by frequently offering new content. Posting status updates, posting pictures of themselves, and changing their profile are all methods of using Facebook to focus attention on the self. These different aspects of providing content will be labeled self-promotion and as a group they are predicted to be positively associated with GE.

On the other hand, Ackerman et al. (2011) found that EE tended to be associated with anti-social behaviors that indicate that others should cater to the narcissist's needs without any expectation of reciprocity. In the offline world, people high in EE might expect favors such as time, money, social support, and indications of respect from others. Although time and money might be harder to demand on Facebook, those high in EE should expect social support and respect. Some research suggests that many individuals who gain social support on Facebook feel less stress (Wright et al., 2007). Facebook users who are high in EE would be predicted to demand social support but be unlikely to provide it to others. They feel that others should support them when they are distressed, but they feel no duty to reciprocate.

There are several ways that those high in EE might expect to receive respect from their social network on Facebook. Those high on EE would be likely to use Facebook to determine what others are saying about them. They would be more likely to focus on the status updates from their network for the purpose of determining if their network is speaking as well of them as their inflated sense of self-importance would demand. Some research suggests that when someone high in trait narcissism is slighted, they aggressively retaliate (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Ackerman et al. (2011) argue that EE is the subscale is the aspect of narcissism most associated with socially disruptive behaviors such as aggression. Therefore, EE is predicted to be associated with responding to negative comments from others with verbally aggressive responses. Finally, if the EE subscale is tapping into a trait that demands respect from others, they would also be predicted to become angry when they do not get the respect they feel they deserve. One way this might be expressed on Facebook would be becoming angry when others do not comment on their status updates. When people post status updates on Facebook, others have the opportunity to indicate agreement or praise their comments. Someone high in EE would become angry when they did not get this attention. These hypotheses were tested using a survey of Facebook users.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample

There were 294 participants in the survey whose ages ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M$ = 23.26, $SD$ = 7.30). Of this sample, 74.1% were college students and 68% were female. The sample was a convenience sample recruited by the members of an undergraduate research methods course in a medium sized Midwestern, American university. They contacted their social network and solicited volunteers to complete the survey. Participations were uncompensated. All participants were Facebook users.

### 4.2. Procedure

Participants were given a link to the online consent form that described their rights as research participants. If they indicated that they agreed to participate, an online survey appeared. The online survey began with the questions regarding Facebook use, and then they were asked the GE, and EE subscales of the NPI using the items identified by Ackerman et al. (2011). After the NPI subscales was the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale and then basic demographic items.

### 4.3. Instruments

The items for all the original scales are contained in Appendix A. Table 1 contains means, standard deviations, number of items, and reliability estimates for all of the focal constructs. The first set of items concerned the frequency with which the participants engaged in particular Facebook behaviors on a 6-point scale ranging from "never" to "all the time". These include the self-promotion behaviors, accepting strangers as friends, and retaliating against mean comments. The participants were next asked the items from Dillard and Shen (2005) felt anger scale by instructing participants to "Please use the following scale to respond to how you feel when people do not comment as much as you would like on your status updates on Facebook". For each of the four emotions listed (irritated, angry, annoyed, aggravated) they were asked to respond using an 11-point scale ranging from "I feel none of this emotion" to "I feel a great deal of this emotion". Most of the remaining Facebook