



## Mirror or Megaphone?: How relationships between narcissism and social networking site use differ on Facebook and Twitter



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### ABSTRACT

As research on the connection between narcissism and social networking site (SNS) use grows, definitions of SNS and measurements of their use continue to vary, leading to conflicting results. To improve understanding of the relationship between narcissism and SNS use, as well as the implications of differences in definition and measurement, we examine two ways of measuring Facebook and Twitter use by testing the hypothesis that SNS use is positively associated with narcissism. We also explore the relation between these types of SNS use and different components of narcissism within college students and general adult samples. Our findings suggest that for college students, posting on Twitter is associated with the Superiority component of narcissistic personality while Facebook posting is associated with the Exhibitionism component. Conversely, adults high in Superiority post on Facebook more rather than Twitter. For adults, Facebook and Twitter are both used more by those focused on their own appearances but not as a means of showing off, as is the case with college students. Given these differences, it is essential for future studies of SNS use and personality traits to distinguish between different types of SNS, different populations, and different types of use.

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### 1. Introduction

There has been a dramatic rise in the use of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter over the past several years. SNS currently account for nearly one quarter of the total time spent online, and almost 80% of Internet users report some SNS use (Comscore, 2011). These sites have become one of the primary venues in which people interact with one another, establish their identities and friendships, and influence peers. This has attracted considerable scholarly attention, much of it devoted to investigating relationships between psychological traits and the use of such sites. A growing number of these studies focus on how narcissism and behavior on SNS are related (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Ong et al., 2011; Ryan & Xenos, 2011), surmising that such sites may be products of and/or contribute to a growing culture of self-centeredness, particularly among college students.

In fact, cross-temporal meta-analyses of narcissism and empathy levels among college students over the past three decades have found decreases in empathic concern (i.e., sympathy for the misfortunes of others) along with increases in narcissism (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011; Twenge, Konrath, Foster,

Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Though these trends pre-date the popularization of SNS, the rate of decline in empathic concern has accelerated since 2000 (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011), prompting researchers to speculate that the rise of SNS may have enabled narcissistic individuals to seek veneration on a grander scale than would otherwise be feasible (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011).

Narcissism is a complex construct and represents multiple traits, indicative of both healthy and unhealthy behaviors (Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004) that may explain the motivations behind SNS use. Therefore, conceptualizing narcissism as just a single construct might cause us to misunderstand the ways in which SNS are used to satisfy various psychological needs. Research has in fact already begun to examine how unhealthy components of narcissistic personality relate to behavior on Facebook (Carpenter, 2012).

The current study pursues this line of research by investigating how both healthy and unhealthy components of narcissism inform Facebook and Twitter use. We proceed by first discussing narcissism and how it relates to SNS use. Treating all SNS as a single concept rather than differentiating among specific types of SNS such as Twitter and Facebook may elide important differences in motivations people have for using SNS. Therefore, key differences in the affordances of Facebook and Twitter relevant to narcissism research are then discussed, highlighting the ways in which the ob-

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served association between narcissism and SNS use may change depending on the type of SNS platform used and the behavior assessed.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Defining and measuring narcissism

Narcissism is typically characterized as a tendency to consider one's self to be better than others, to constantly seek veneration from others, and to engage in self-centered thinking and behavior (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). As is common with personality constructs, narcissistic traits among the general population tend to occur along a continuum.

Several negative outcomes have been associated with higher levels of narcissism. Increases in narcissism represent a possible threat to young adults' emotional and psychological health. Narcissism is known to be associated with the use of personal interaction as a means for self-enhancement and self-promotion (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), which can prevent individuals from forming long-term intimate relationships (Campbell, 1999; Campbell & Foster, 2002) and otherwise impairs individuals' abilities to form healthy interpersonal relationships (Khodabakhsh & Besharat, 2011; Ogrodniczuk, Piper, Joyce, Steinberg, & Duggal, 2009). There may be broader, societal costs to increases in narcissism as well. Individuals high in narcissism are more likely to react with aggressive behavior after being criticized (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002). They have also been shown to act in their best short-term interests to the detriment of the long-term interests of others when such interests conflict with one another (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005). However, narcissism also has aspects associated with positive outcomes. It has been associated with high self-esteem, extraversion, openness to experience, and low anxiety and neuroticism (Emmons, 1984; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbul, 2004).

Narcissism can therefore be thought of as multi-dimensional in nature; within the broadly defined construct of narcissism there exist several discrete components of narcissistic behavior and thinking. The existence of multiple components of narcissism has been corroborated in several studies by using principal component analyses (Emmons, 1984; Kubarych et al., 2004; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Using Raskin and Terry's (1988) narcissism personality index (NPI) as the basis for exploratory analyses of the construct of narcissism, these analyses yielded several components including: Exhibitionism (i.e., showing off), Entitlement (i.e., believing that one deserves the best), Exploitativeness (i.e., taking advantage of others), Superiority (i.e., feeling better than others), Authority (i.e., feeling like a leader), Self-Sufficiency (i.e., valuing independence), and Vanity (i.e., focusing on one's appearance).

All components convey a sense of high self-valuation but relate to distinct feelings and behaviors. Some of these are considered indicative of healthy human initiative, whereas others are considered to be unhealthy (Kubarych et al., 2004). For example, Self-Sufficiency is correlated with traits that are viewed as positive, at least in Western societies, such as independence (Raskin & Terry, 1988). On the other hand, components such as Exploitativeness are considered unhealthy, correlating with traits considered to be negative such as Machiavellianism (McHoskey, 1995) and hostility (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Some components are neither particularly healthy nor unhealthy. Exhibitionism, for instance, does not involve anything as overtly harmful as manipulation of others or hostility but rather indicates extraversion and a lack of impulse control. Knowing how experiences associated with healthy and unhealthy

components of narcissism differ is essential to understanding the consequences of higher levels of narcissism, and studies often examine the emergence of such differential relationships (e.g., Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009; Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008).

### 2.2. Narcissism and SNS use

Given that narcissism is associated with the use of personal interaction as a means for self-enhancement and self-promotion (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), various attributes of SNS make them seem like an ideal tool for achieving these narcissistic goals. SNS offer users near complete control over self-presentations, making them a useful venue for the deployment of strategic interpersonal behaviors that narcissists use to construct and maintain a carefully considered self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). They provide users with abundant ways to interact, whether in private or public, individually or collectively. Individuals who value their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences (collectively referred to hereafter as "self-expressions") highly and who anticipate others' high levels of interest in their self-expressions can publicize them to a wide audience. SNS allow users to dwell on past self-expressions as well as the popularity of those self-expressions manifested in various metrics such as "likes" or "shares" in the case of Facebook and "followers" or "re-tweets" in the case of Twitter. Facebook, in particular, can be an ideal tool for self-promotion as users can frequently post status updates, comments or photos of themselves and reasonably expect timely and frequent positive feedback. Moreover, given the rise of SNS use on mobile devices, SNS are accessible at all times and in all places. Narcissists need not wait until others are available to engage in self-aggrandizement, but can instead curate, manage, and promote an online "self" throughout the day.

Among studies of the relation between SNS use and narcissism, most point to a positive correlation between narcissism and amount of SNS use (e.g., Ryan & Xenos, 2011), even though the evidence remains somewhat mixed. Behaviors such as self-promotion through status updates (Mehdizadeh, 2010), descriptions of one's self, and photo posts (Bergman et al., 2011; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; DeWall, Buffardi, Bonser, & Campbell, 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010) are higher for users with higher levels of narcissism. Others have suggested positive associations between narcissism and measures of some quality or aspect of use by conducting linguistic analyses of profile pages (DeWall et al., 2011) and semiotic analyses of photos (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011).

However, results regarding time spent on SNS and frequency of status updates are inconclusive. Whereas one study found narcissism to be positively related to time spent on SNS and the number of times users logged on (Mehdizadeh, 2010), other studies have found no relationship between narcissism and time spent on the site (Bergman et al., 2011; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). A survey of adolescents from Singapore reported that after accounting for extraversion, narcissism predicted the frequency of Facebook status updates (Ong et al., 2011). No such relationship was found among American college students (Bergman et al., 2011) though, prompting the authors to contend that those high in narcissism do not appear to use SNS more often than those low in narcissism, but that their reasons for using SNS are different. People high in narcissism are driven to use SNS by the belief that others are interested in their activities and their desire for others to know about them.

Recent work has also begun to examine how the various components of the narcissistic personality relate to behavior on Facebook. A study of the aspects of narcissism that drive self-promoting and anti-social behavior on Facebook uses the two components indicative of unhealthy behavior from Ackerman et al., 2011 three-component conceptualization of narcissism: 'Grandi-

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