



## Research Report

## Two faces of narcissism on SNS: The distinct effects of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism on SNS privacy control

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## ABSTRACT

This study suggests narcissism as an important psychological factor that predicts one's behavioral intention to control information privacy on SNS. Particularly, we approach narcissism as a two-dimensional construct—vulnerable and grandiose narcissism—to provide a better understanding of the role of narcissism in SNS usage. As one of the first studies to apply a two-dimensional approach to narcissism in computer-mediated communication, our results show that vulnerable narcissism has a significant positive effect on behavioral intention to control privacy on SNS, while grandiose narcissism has no effect. This effect was found when considering other personality traits, including self-esteem, computer anxiety, and concern for information privacy. The results indicate that unidimensional approaches to narcissism cannot solely predict SNS behaviors, and the construct of narcissism should be broken down into two orthogonal constructs.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, technology advances in social networking sites (SNS) have allowed people to share interpersonal information at a very rapid rate and now, nearly everything that an individual does on SNS can be broadcasted in real-time to the entire network. The ability to immediately access personal information on SNS, however, introduces an inevitable tradeoff cost – the potential loss of privacy. Unlike other Internet platforms that have an anonymous nature, many SNS require users to disclose private information (O'Brien & Torres, 2012). Given that the large amount of information on SNS is personal, the potential risks that are associated with unsafe use of private information have become a primary concern among SNS users (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009; Taneja, Vitrano, & Gengo, 2014). While increasing attention has been paid to the issue of SNS privacy, less is known about discrete personality traits that might explain how people control information about themselves on SNS.

The objective of our study is, therefore, to identify psychological factors that predict user responses to privacy-threatening activities on SNS. To this end, we focus on the concept of narcissism as a predictor, because narcissism significantly influences people to

expose personal information on SNS (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Carpenter, 2012; DeWall, Buffardi, Bonser, & Campbell, 2011; Leung, 2013; Mehdizadeh, 2010). Particularly, we approach narcissism as a two-dimensional construct, comprised of (1) grandiose narcissism and (2) vulnerable narcissism. Although the concept of narcissism has received considerable attention in SNS literature, most empirical studies in computer-mediated communication have analyzed narcissism as a one-dimensional construct (e.g., Bergman et al., 2011; Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearington, 2014; DeWall et al., 2011; Mehdizadeh, 2010). Yet, empirical evidence in social psychology suggests that narcissism should be viewed as two orthogonal constructs (Besser & Priel, 2010; Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Miller et al., 2011; Wink, 1991). Following this stream of research in psychology, the current study considers two distinctive dimensions of narcissism, and this is one of the first studies in information literature to approach narcissism from this perspective.

Furthermore, in order to better assess the distinctive effect of the two forms of narcissism on information control, we consider other traits in our investigation, drawing from both psychology and information privacy literature. These traits include self-esteem, computer anxiety, and concern for information privacy. The findings from our study provide both theoretical and managerial implications regarding personality traits and their predictability to explain users' responses to the issue of privacy infringement on SNS.

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## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. SNS privacy and personality trait

SNS are typically initiated by a small group of people, and then through word-of-mouth communication, the membership grows as more and more people send invitations to their acquaintances to join the networking site (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). What is unique about this form of the Internet is that SNS are built upon universally shared experiences and require disclosing personal information about users. Due to the identify-revealed nature of SNS, the concern for privacy is a growing issue, as the SNS expand in popularity. One anecdotal example comes from 2006, when Facebook launched a site modification that threatened the privacy. Facebook users formed groups to protest the new feature that enabled the users' activity to be publicly viewed by other Facebook users through a development of the 'News Feed' (boyd, 2008). The feature increased the exposure to previously accessible information, which caused users to lose their personal sense of privacy control. In less than a day, Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, responded through a blog, reassuring users that modifications would be made (boyd, 2008). While it was not the first time that the privacy became a concern for users and SNS corporate entities, it was one of the largest landmark events that spurred the concern of all parties invested in SNS.

Given that privacy is of critical concern among SNS users, researchers have begun to conduct studies on various aspects of information disclosure on SNS. While many factors related to information privacy have been identified, previous studies tended to focus on contextual or situational factors of SNS usage rather than dispositional factors of SNS users. For example, Joinson (2008) argued that specific online features and functions developed by SNS companies facilitated users' willingness to share personal information. Nagle and Singh (2009) demonstrated that the existence of mutual connections between users largely determines one's willingness to disclose personal information. Debatin et al. (2009) further demonstrated that users who experienced infringing privacy are more likely to control their private information because previous experience with privacy attack enables them to realize the visibility of privacy invasion. Later, Nosko, Wood, and Molema (2010) suggested that users decide to disclose personal information based on the type of information on SNS.

While aforementioned situational factors substantially influence behaviors related to information privacy, one's inherent characteristics also play a pivotal role in the extent to which he or she is willing to control personal information. According to a trait theory, a personality trait is useful for predicting individual differences in several online behaviors because a personality trait has a tendency to show consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Liu & Arnett, 2002). The present study thus incorporated personality traits to the theoretical model to provide a more thorough understanding of the ways in which people are concerned about privacy and thus decide to disengage in activities that threaten privacy. In particular, we consider narcissism – and specifically, distinct features of narcissism – as an important personality trait to explore.

### 2.2. Narcissism and SNS privacy

Narcissism is one of the key factors that explain the proliferation of SNS. People who display narcissism are often self-confident and self-absorbed. They tend to boast and brag about themselves to others. For those who display this inflated self-concept, SNS are useful and convenient platforms for their self-promoting (Bergman et al., 2011). Numerous studies have suggested that

narcissism is a significant trait that drives more people to expose their personal information on SNS. Buffardi and Campbell (2008), for example, demonstrated that narcissism predicted higher levels of activities on SNS and more self-promoting content in several aspects of SNS. Mehdizadeh (2010) also observed that individuals high on narcissism were more likely to use Facebook. DeWall et al. (2011) showed that people with narcissistic tendencies communicate on SNS with self-promoting images and words about themselves to draw more attention to them. Carpenter (2012) suggested that narcissistic people tend to use SNS to seek a large audience for attention by posting information about them. Further, such positive relationships between narcissism and SNS usage have been found among in other user bases, such as Australian Internet users (Ryan & Xenos, 2011) and adolescents (Ong et al., 2011).

Since narcissism is viewed as a strong driving factor of self-disclosure on SNS, scholars attempted to explore the relationship between narcissism and privacy concerns. For example, Utz and Kramer (2009) expected that highly narcissistic users are less strict in their privacy settings on SNS because they believed that narcissism motivates users to disclose a great deal of information. Nevertheless, the results of their study showed no empirical relationship between narcissism and privacy settings on SNS. One explanation of why narcissism and intention to use privacy control were unrelated would be because of a unidimensional approach to narcissism. Although there has been an increasing recognition of the two orthogonal dimensions of narcissism in social psychology, most studies on narcissism in communication discipline have adopted a single dimensional operationalization and measurement of narcissism, which might result in perplexing results. In this study, we incorporate two forms of narcissism into our investigation, as it may be able to shed light on the link between narcissism and SNS behaviors. The next section addresses how the two faces of narcissism differ on ways people behave.

### 2.3. Grandiose vs. vulnerable narcissism

The two forms of narcissism were first conceptualized and examined by Wink (1991). As the narcissism literature had repeatedly documented lack of correlations among the most widely used narcissism scales, Wink (1991) questioned the existence of heterogeneity of narcissism. He conducted principal component analyses of the scales, which yielded two orthogonal dimensions. He further conceptualized the two components according to the psychodynamic theory (Kernberg, 1975) and labeled them as (1) grandiosity-exhibitionism narcissism and (2) vulnerability-sensitivity narcissism. Later, a considerable body of psychology literature has confirmed the existence of two orthogonal constructs of narcissism (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Miller & Campbell, 2008; Rathvon & Holmstrom, 1996), and the two forms are often labeled shortly as grandiose vs. vulnerable narcissism (Besser & Priel, 2010; Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Miller et al., 2011). The two forms share the core traits of narcissism, such as sense of entitlement, disregard of others, and grandiose self-relevant fantasies (Besser & Priel, 2010). However, they differ in many other constructs, each having unique characteristic. That is, individuals high on either dimensions behave similarly, but motivation behind their behaviors are completely different.

First, grandiose narcissism is primarily associated with immediate expressions of exhibitionism and self-importance (Wink, 1991). People who display the traits of grandiose narcissism reflect ideals, which are referred to as grand, often showing aggression and domination within their actions (Miller et al., 2011). It is similar to Reich's (1970) definition of 'phallic' narcissism, which emphasizes flagrant display of superiority and arrogant self-assurance. Because grandiose narcissism reflects traits related to

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