

# Social Media Use, Narcissism and the Role of Positive Self-Views and Religiosity

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## Abstract

This paper studies social media use, narcissism and the role of positive self-views and religiosity. Data was collected through online questionnaires from 226 social media users from Pakistan. The findings suggest that social media use and narcissism are not related however social media use and positive self-views have a highly positive relation. Positive self-views and narcissism have significantly negative relation and the findings also show that religiosity does not moderate the relation between positive self-views and narcissism. Limitations and future direction of study is also discussed at the end of this paper.

**Keywords:** Social media use. Positive self-views. Narcissism. Religiosity.

## Introduction

The popularity and excessive usage of social media has made it an attractive domain of research. Numerous researches are conducted in this domain each highlighting important results. One of the factors that is readily studied with use of social media is narcissism. Term narcissism is derived from a Greek myth related to narcissus, famous for his beauty but was cursed that if he will look at his reflection for too long he will die (Stone, 1998). One of the more recent researches says narcissism is a personality characteristic which is related to self-centered and exaggerated self-concept (Marcus, Machilek, Schütz, 2006). Among the social media platforms that researchers use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace but Facebook is the most popular and attractive one with 968 million daily active users on average for June 2015 (<http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>).

Religiosity is an old concept that has been prevailing in societies since ancient times with its roots firmly developed on the past values. It is a multi-dimensional term, “As was confirmed by the majority of reviewers, religion is a multifaceted object, incorporating cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural aspects” (Hackney & Sanders, 2003). A great deal of research has been conducted on this topic that highlighted various aspects that help in understanding the mind set and behaviours of the individuals.

The literature found on narcissism and religiosity is rich however still some gaps exist. First, among the factors discussed with narcissism, religiosity is the least discussed one and also the literature on positive self-views discussed with respect to social media is also less. Second, most of the researches that are conducted so far on social media use, positive self-views and narcissism are conducted outside Pakistan. Third, in the previous researches people from the same city or in some cases from same church were considered

which lacked the element of diversity as opinions and beliefs can change as you move from one city to other.

Such study is not conducted in Pakistan before so it will open more corridors for research in this domain in future. With the inclusion large sample it will help in generalization of results. Research will help in solving the curiosity that how religiosity of an individual can act as a buffer against narcissism when he is exposed to social media. The research can also help the owners of social media in understanding that how these media are contributing towards the shaping of personalities and what new opportunities can they tap as some researches can also come up with interesting findings that were not entertained before.

There are several objectives of this study and these are to find; does use of social media causes narcissism, does use of social media creates positive self-views, does positive self-views leads to narcissism, does religiosity moderate the relation between positive self-views and narcissism.

## **Literature Review and hypotheses**

### **Social media use and narcissism**

We find ourselves immersed in this media one way or the other. Such platforms provide many opportunities to the individuals by which they can express themselves and communicate with others. Social media has developed at an exciting rate in the recent past (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009). One of the traits that has readily gained attentions of the researchers and studied with respect to social media is narcissism. Researchers have devoted much time in finding how social media use effects our personality. Narcissism is identified as willingness to think that one is better from others, getting one's self busy in self-centered thinking and activities (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002).

The definition of narcissism has helped in building understanding of this term. Before going in to further details we must need to know that how this trait is developed or born in any individual. Since narcissism is a personality trait we can say that it might get birth during the age when an individual's personality building. As a person's personality is gets built, all of its traits are not as one comes off age because some of the traits gets discarded and others may get reinforced depending on the environment and other behaviours. Hothkiss (2003) shows in her study that narcissism can develop during the initial teenage years when a child finds that the needs related to having a poise view of themselves that helps in training for life are not fulfilled by the definite society.

In light of above study one may say that as these needs are not fulfilled by the society so one looks for alternatives from where these needs can be fulfilled or one is attracted towards the medium where one thinks or perceives that this need might get fulfilled. One of the platforms that is readily accessed to get opinions is social media and social media is full of exaggerated views which reinforces the already established traits of narcissism and makes person narcissistic as instead of meeting the needs of poise views one is exposed to glorious world of social media which makes a person narcissist.

Another factor that can help in understanding that how social media use causes narcissism is "Acquired Situational Narcissism". Millman (2005) described this term as a type of narcissism which nurtures in late adolescence and the main causes of this are wealth, fame and deceiving related to celebrity. According to Stephen Sherrill's (2001) in "New York Times" individuals who look for fame are more narcissistic as compared to others but the ideal nourishing of such traits is reached when one start getting the required fame. Social media presents the individual with lots of opportunities that can help individuals to self-promote through their posts and make themselves popular among their friends reinforcing the

narcissist's traits in them. So use of social media creates narcissist by reinforcing the traits in an individual that cause narcissism. Consequently the following hypothesis is developed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Social media will be positively related to narcissism.

### **Social Media Use and positive self-views**

There are studies conducted to find how a social media platform which is Facebook in our case can generate positive-self views. People selectively present themselves on the Facebook to highlight the behaviors that are socially desirable and which may not be visible in their face to face or offline meetings. These desirables include, "character, intelligence and other important inner qualities" (Zhao, Grasmuck, Martin, 2008). Why a person would engage in such a behavior, one answer can be to gain positive comments about the self by portraying the traits that are accepted by a large social circle. As Facebook is also a social media platform and can be used by the people to present themselves with a possible intention of getting positive self-views one may say that use of Facebook can generate possible self-views.

One of the many other activities that a user is involved while using social media is making friends. Hampton, Goult, Rainie & Purcell (2011) conducted a survey and found that users of internet especially Facebook users get more social support online. Gottlieb (2000) defines social support as, "Process of interaction in relationships which improves coping, esteem, belonging, and competence through actual or perceived exchanges of physical or psychosocial resources." This definition shows that social support enhances esteem. Social media also presents many means by which one can gain social support and social support means improved self-esteem, then one can say that use of social media improves self-esteem or generates positive self-views.

Gonzales & Hancock (2011) found that when a person gets in contact with one's social media profile's data while using social media then the person's self-esteem improves. Though this finding was contradictory to what OSA (objective self-awareness theory) says. Consequently the second hypothesis can be developed.

**Hypothesis 2:** Use of social media generates positive self-views.

### **Positive self-views and narcissism**

The use of social media is remarkable in the current time and each individual tries to make the best out of it by focusing on their particular needs. These needs can vary from person to person and from personality to personality. Each individual has a set of needs and once that person is logged in from his or her social media's profile then it becomes a priority for the individual to satisfy those needs which may result in increase in their self-esteem. The term self-esteem got first time on paper in late twentieth century through William James' publication, *The Principles of Psychology*, in 1890 which states "average tone of self-feeling that each of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent".

Heine, Kitayama, Lehman & Markus, (1999) states in their study that self-esteem is applied to a specific model of self and one of the model has importance for social relations and social connectedness. Miller, Hoffman, Gaughan, Gentile, Maples & Campbell (2011) found that individuals who are high on grandiose narcissism are found to be temperately high on self-esteem too and if one is high on self-esteem one can also be high on positive self-views too.

Ryan & Xenos, (2011) found in their study that users of social media have high scores for leadership and exhibitionism as compared to the non-users. On this base we can say that social media users are more inclined towards exhibitionism and these users may also have high positive self-views which they want to depict on the social media by the act of exhibition and high on exhibition means high on narcissism as previous researchers have found positive relation between social media use and narcissism (Carpenter, 2012).

Self-esteem is regarded as positive measure of one's self (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman & Campbell, 2012) so it can be said that person with high self-esteem has positive self-views and if some aspects of social media are related to self-esteem then they can also be related to positive self-views as well. The study of Campbell and Foster (2007) points out the fact that those who are high in narcissism have exaggerated positive self-concept. (Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002) showed that narcissists have positive self-views. Since narcissists have highly positive self-views it can be said that use of social media creates positive self-views which creates narcissism as social media presents its users with numerous possibilities in which they can reinforce their positive self-concept through presentation or by getting endorsing comments.

Positive self-views or self-esteem should not be confused with overconfidence. Researches in psychology has found that people are over confident (De Bondt and Thaler (1995). Overconfidence is the inclination to place oneself in a more favourable way as compared to others (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, and Vredenburg (1995). Self-esteem on the other hand is independent of objective measures as already defined (William James, 1980). From this concept we can assume if a person is high on self-esteem will not be influenced by the comparisons with others as this trait is subjectively incorporated into one's personality where as a person who is overconfident will have an overly estimated positive views about self and will also place oneself as superior to others.

Further understanding of how positive self-views can make one narcissist can be cleared from O'Brien's book in which he has discussed Cooley's (1983) concept of "Looking Glass Self". The book states, there is no concept of "I" independent of corresponding concept of "You" or "He or "They". What this basically means is that if one think something about one's self in a certain way then it's because someone else also think about the individual in that way "You" which builds the foundation of that "I" concept which one thinks about oneself. This discussion highlight the fact that as one uses social media there is a chance that the individual can receive social support from one's social audience (Hampton, Goult, Rainie & Purcell, 2012) and one form of that support can be endorsing comments that can build positive self-view in a person according to "Looking Glass Self" theory and one can start building positive self-views about one's self which can lead to narcissism because people think you are good which boosts your self-esteem and you also start thinking like that.

The third hypothesis of this study is:

**Hypothesis 3:** Positive self-views leads to narcissism.

### **Moderating role of religiosity between positive self-views and narcissism**

Hill & Hood, (1999) defines religiosity as, "phenomena that include some relevance to traditional institutionalized searches to acknowledge and maintain some relationship with transcendent." Religiosity has played a major role in transforming beliefs and attitudes of the people. Allport & Ross (1967) studied that self-enhancement is not a drive behind intrinsic religiosity. According to this study individuals with inherent religious orientation consider

religion as their major drive and other factors though might be important are considered less worthy and also changed in conformity with religious faith and teachings. Another dimension that is discussed in this study is “extrinsic religiosity” which says that this dimension is related as a mean to achieve something.

As the literature on this topic became richer the understanding of the researchers on this topic became more thorough and some concepts were refined. Gorsuch (1997) came up with a refined concept of Allport’s “intrinsic religiosity” saying that it’s a drive for going through and experiencing one’s religious belief for the belief itself. So it tells us a person’s affiliation towards its religion or the increased level of religiosity is because of maintaining that belief rather than to use it as a mean to some other end.

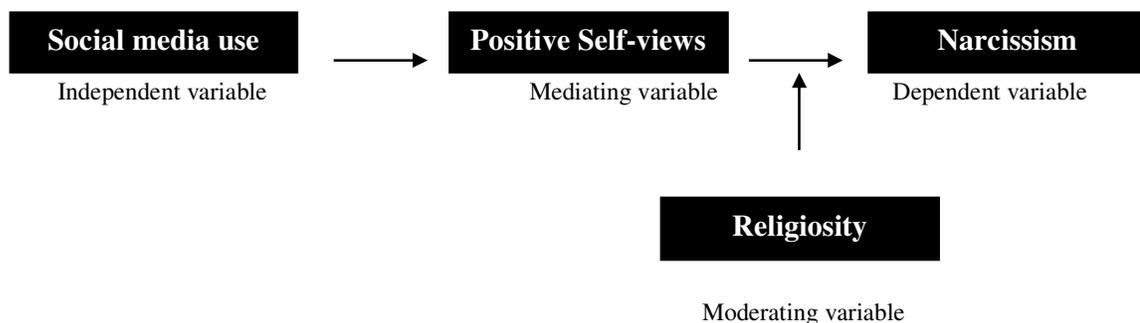
On this basis we can say that those high on religiosity will be less moved by the positive self-views as a person who has strong inherent religiosity will be the one who will not be moved by such views as what he is concerned about is intrinsic religious concepts and once one is not moved by the positive self-views we can say that relationship between positive self-views and narcissism gets weaker. However Batson, Naifeh & Pate (1978) found that “Socially desirable responding” and inherent religiosity of an individual have a positive relationship. This study talks about “socially desirable responding” and at that time the social media didn’t exist. However if we relate this study to the present time we can also include the social media platforms in it as they are also one way of doing interactions and presenting oneself through social media profile to the people. When a person uses social media the person behaves in a certain way and if a person is depicting socially desirable trait we may say that these traits can bring positive views to his profile which can make person narcissist according to “Looking Glass Self” theory as previously discussed in the above heading.

Burris and Navara’s (2002) study also shows that individuals high in religiosity have feel about upholding positive image about their self in both their own and other’s eyes. This result was contrary to Allport’s finding. In another research relationship between “Socially Desirable Responding” and extrinsic religiosity was proved to be negative (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2009).

Religion is very important in shaping the personalities and behaviors of any individual in the society and since Pakistani society also consider religion as an important factor as it also shapes many of people’s behaviors and acts so it becomes worth to check what role can the religiosity play in this relationship between positive self-views and narcissism does it moderate the relationship or not and which of the previous studies that were conducted in other countries will be consistent with this study. Consequently the fourth hypothesis of the study can be developed.

**Hypothesis 4:** Religiosity moderates the relationship between positive self-views and narcissism.

**Theoretical Framework:**



## **Methodology**

Respondents were communicated with the purpose and goal of the research before requesting them to be the part of this study. The respondents who agreed for their participation were asked to fill an online questionnaire. There were no incentives provided to the respondents and the participation in this study was absolutely voluntary. All the respondents were assured that their responses will remain confidential.

A sample of 300 social media users from multiple cities of Pakistan filled the questionnaire out of which incomplete questionnaires were discarded and 226 responses were selected for the final analysis. Males accounted for 50.2% of the total respondents and the mean age of the sample was 23.39 years and all the respondents were from Pakistan. Due to time constraints and its popularity Facebook users were focused from the social media platforms.

### **Measures**

All the variables were evaluated on the basis of self-reports. Five point Likert scale was adopted. Anchors ranged from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. For measuring how much positive response one gets from friends on social media the anchors were 1-never to 5-always.

### **Social Media Use**

The respondents were evaluated on the basis of the time spend on social media platform, number of friends, affiliation with social media and how they feel about their social media use. For evaluating these dimensions questionnaire was adopted on the basis of the instrument developed by Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007). All the items were self-reported and the responses were measured on a five point Likert scale. The reliability of this measure was,  $\alpha=0.80$ .

Among the respondents 4.8% had 25 or less Facebook friends, 19.9% had Facebook friends falling in 26-100 bracket, 24.2% had 101-200 Facebook friends, 34.2% had Facebook friends falling in 200-400 bracket and 16.9% had more than 400 Facebook friends. 18.2% of the respondents spent 0-30 minutes, 24.2% spent 30 minutes-1 hour, 21.2% spent 1-2 hours, 17.7% spent 2-3 hours and 18.6% spent 3 hour or more on average using Facebook during the past week.

### **Positive Self-views:**

Positive Self-views were measured by using Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1989). The reliability of this measure was,  $\alpha=0.79$ . All the responses were evaluated on five point Likert scale. This instrument was used to measure the positive-self views and a few additional questions were included to check how much acknowledgement or endorsements are received by the respondent on their social media posts. It helped in testing how these positive comments on social media posts can help in creative positive self-views in an individual. These questions were, I get positive comments on my Facebook posts, I get likes on my Facebook comments, My Facebook friends like and enjoy whatever I post on Facebook, and My Facebook friends appreciate my posts and comment. These questions were also tested for reliability which came out to be,  $\alpha=0.88$ . These additional questions had anchors of 1. Never to 5. Always.

### **Religiosity**

Religiosity was measured on the basis of instrument adopted on the basis of Allport and Ross, (1967) religious orientation scale. One of the items from this intrinsic scale is; my

religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life, measured on a Likert scale. With reference to our topic and Pakistan's cultural context some modification was done in the instrument. Some of the questions were adopted to match beliefs and understanding of our sample and it was also necessary to adopt these questions to measure their religiosity dimensions properly.

The additions made were; I pray of Friday, I give Zakah, I pray five times a day, I read the Holy Quran. These items were also measured on a five point Likert scale. The instrument was then tested for reliability before administering it for data collection and the test results showed alpha's value to be ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ).

### *Narcissism*

For measuring narcissism NPI-16 developed by Ames, Rose & Anderson (2006) was used. Each option was provided with two contrasting statements and the respondents were asked to select the most appropriate one keeping in view their personality. Each statement was assigned with a dummy value, 0 for responses inconsistent with narcissism and 1 for responses consistent with it. Mean values of the responses were then calculated. Higher values mean higher on narcissism. Alpha value of this instrument is ( $\alpha = 0.7$ ).

## Results

Correlation and regression analysis.

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**Table 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities**

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4
1. Social media use	3.63	.72	(.80)	-		
2. Positive self-views	3.61	.53	.15*	(.79)	-	
3. Religiosity	3.32	.48	-.05	.31**	(0.67)	-
4. Narcissism	.29	.19	.000	-.23**	-.18**	(0.7)

N = 226; Cronbach's alpha is presented in parentheses; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

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Correlation analysis is shown in the table 1. Social media use and narcissism has no relation. Social media use and positive self-views have significantly positive co-relation. Positive self-views and religiosity also has a significantly positive co-relation. Positive self-views and narcissism has significantly negative co-relation. Similarly religiosity and narcissism also has significant co-relation but the co-relation here is negative. Positive co-relation means that increase in one variable will cause a significant increase in other variable as the analysis has found significant positive co-relation here. Negative co-relation means that increase in one will lead to a significant decrease in other variable.

**Table 2. Regression analysis of social media use, positive self-views, religiosity and narcissism**

Variables	Standardized Coefficients	Significance	$\Delta R^2 = 0.05$
	Beta		
1. Social media use	.02	.72***	
2. Positive self-views	-.19	.005*	
3. Religiosity	-.12	.088**	

Dependent variable: Narcissism

Predictors: Social media use, positive self-views, religiosity

\*p < 0.05      \*\*p < 0.1      \*\*\*p > 0.1      N= 226

Regression analysis was conducted to test all the four hypothesis, its results are shown in table 2. First hypothesis suggested that social media use lead to narcissism. For the first hypothesis the result was ( $\beta=0.02$ ,  $p > 0.1$ ). It shows that social media use and narcissism have positive relation but it's very insignificant as the significance value is considerably greater than 0.1. The mean value of sample's responses for narcissism was 0.3 which is close to 0. Hence sample was found low on narcissism when related with use of social media. This finding is inconsistent with what first hypothesis proposed. Second hypothesis proposed that social media use leads to positive self-views, result suggest highly significant positive relation between social media use and positive self-views ( $\beta=1.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding is consistent with what the second hypothesis proposed.

Third hypothesis proposed that positive self-views lead to narcissism. However the results show a highly significant negative relation between positive self-views and narcissism ( $\beta= -.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding is inconsistent with third hypothesis. Fourth hypothesis suggested that religiosity will moderate the relation between positive self-views and narcissism, test result was ( $\beta= -.178$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ). This shows that there is a highly significant negative relation between religiosity and narcissism. The negative relation between positive self-views and narcissism is more strengthened by religiosity in this study instead of being moderated so fourth hypothesis also doesn't stand.

### Discussion

With each passing day our lives are getting more and more influenced by the use of social media. Considering this fact it's important to know how social media is creating an impact on our personalities. Considerable research has been conducted in last decade to explain narcissism (Marcus, Machilek and Schütz, 2006; Millman, 2005). This study also deals with the social media use and along with it positive self-views and religiosity are introduced as mediating and moderating variables. The result of the second hypothesis suggests that if a person is using social media more the person will have more positive self-

views. This is found to be consistent as supported by the results above. However the positive self-views may be in the form self-esteem which is considered to be a healthy thing to have. This can be one of the reason we got contradictory result compared to our hypothesis. For a better insight certain elements of overconfidence could be introduced in later studies which can solve this problem

In this study religiosity acted as a moderating variable. I hypothesized that positive self-views lead to narcissism and on this basis I introduced religiosity as a moderating variable to check how it influences this relation. Relation between religiosity and narcissism is found to be significantly negative and the relation between positive self-views and narcissism is also significantly negative. Hence one can say that religiosity strengthens the negative relationship between positive self-views and narcissism instead of moderating it. In line with Burris and Navara's (2002) study, this study also predicted highly positive relation between positive self-views and religiosity. Correlation results are shown in table 1.

### **Practical Implementations:**

Practically this study will help in understanding that which of the traits of a person's personality are reinforced once one is exposed to the social media and how it can help in developing one's personality and also how one's religiosity dimensions buffers one from the negative personality traits. The study also shows that if one wants to link practically that how social media use causes narcissism then first the person should look into the personality traits that are influenced when one is exposed to the world of social media. Once those traits are understood this relation can be studied as one can precisely identify that which traits get influenced which contribute to the nourishment of narcissism.

### **Conclusion**

This study is conducted in Pakistan and will open gates of research on this topic that will help in understanding the differences that can result on the basis of culture and will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge. This study has some limitations too. First all the responses were self-reported. With enough resources and time in hand one can ask people to fill a response keeping in view their friend's personality or online behavior in mind as it will pinpoint the precise behavior of individuals and will help in better understanding of narcissistic personalities. Secondly due to time constraints the study failed to attract a much larger sample size. A much larger sample could have helped in the generalization of findings in a much better way. The study didn't discuss the element of overconfidence and in future studies can be conducted that may include elements of overconfidence to check how it's related to narcissism in Pakistan's context.

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