



STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT, NEED FOR POPULARITY AND SELF-EVALUATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS.

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between social media engagement, the need for popularity and core self-evaluation amongst young adults in Noida. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires from a sample of 293 undergraduate students (aged 18-21 years, $M_{age} = 19.25$ years). SPSS and SPSS Amos were used for data analysis. The results revealed a) a significant negative correlation between social media engagement and core self-evaluation; b) a significant positive correlation between social media engagement and the need for popularity; c) partial inconsistent mediation between social media engagement and core self-evaluation with the need for popularity as a mediating variable. The findings have an important implication for active social media users, educators and mental health professionals.

Keywords: Young adults, social media engagement, social media, core-self-evaluation, need for popularity

There has been a long-standing interest in understanding the effect of social media on the lives of people. Social media has been found to hurt college students' mental health, leading to academic impairment (Braghieri et al., 2022). In another study, problematic social media usage was found to affect suicidal risk (Sedgwick et al., 2019). Some other aspects that are found to be negatively associated due to the usage of social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn include the weakening of offline communication abilities, the decline in grades and comparison leading to decreased self-esteem (Ahuja & Bharadwaj, 2016).

Several pieces of research have shown the increased negative impact of social media on adolescents therefore it is crucial to investigate the factors that may influence the usage of social media and the various aspects of health that may be affected by social media engagement (SME). Past researchers have found that heavy social media usage is associated with reduced subjective well-being (Wheatley & Buglass, 2019). A positive association is also found between social media use and depression which is mediated by rumination (Mitra & Rangaswamy, 2019). Taken together, it can be observed that social media has been studied with diverse factors such as self-esteem, academic performance and depression.

In this paper, the focus has been laid on the impact of social media engagement on core self-evaluation. A renowned American organizational psychologist introduced the concept of core self-evaluation (CSE) and explained it as the basic evaluation that one makes about their self and their self-worth (Judge et al. 1997). After reviewing a plethora of studies, it was observed that there are a lot of gaps in the past literature concerning the association between SME and CSE. Hereby, an attempt is made to understand the effect of social media engagement on the core self-evaluation of young adults.

The four components of core self-evaluation are explained below:

1. Self-esteem – The attitude towards self, that can be either favourable or unfavourable can be referred to as self-esteem (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2013). Thus, one may have high self-esteem or low self-esteem depending upon the views they have for themselves (Robins et al. 2001). Social media addiction and self-esteem are suggested to have a negative correlation implying higher social media addiction can indicate lesser self-esteem (Hawi & Rupert, 2016).
2. Generalized self-efficacy – Self-efficacy has been described by the renowned social psychologist Bandura (1977) as one's own belief that they are capable of succeeding in whatever situation one faces.
3. Neuroticism – Neuroticism is a personality characteristic that explains an individual's tendency of experiencing negative emotions (Hill et al. 2020).
4. Locus of Control - Julian Rotter introduced the concept of locus of control in the 1950s. It has been explained as the degree to which one feels responsible for the events taking place in their life (Nowicki et al. 2021).

The current study also aims to understand the underlying mechanism of the relationship between SME and CSE by considering the need for popularity (NFP) as a mediating variable. The need for popularity can be explained as individuals' desire to do something such that they appear popular (Santor et al, 2000). Lansu et al. (2022) found that emerging adults linked popularity with likability.

According to previous research, a higher need for popularity and a lower level of self-esteem can lead to a dark side motive for engaging in social networking sites such as insecurity (Ouwkerk & Johnson, 2016). Furthermore, it was revealed that participants find it pleasurable to engage in different social media activities and use them as a means of increasing perceived popularity (Brosch & Anna, 2017).

As per the past studies conducted on these topics, social media engagement has been correlated with other variables such as loneliness (Rolandi et al. 2020), self-esteem (Saiphoo et al. 2020) and fear of missing out (Alt, 2015) however only a few studies could be found with NP as a variable. Overall, it can be understood that the need for popularity is an important construct and holds a lot of relevance in today's world where social media usage has started impacting so many lives around the globe.

The current study aims to understand the complex interplay between the three variables – SME, CSE and NP to fill the current gaps in the literature by examining the effect of SME on CSE whilst shedding light on the underlying working of this association with NP as a mediating variable.

Hypothesis

The need for popularity plays a significant mediating role in social media engagement and self-evaluation.

Sample

A sample of 304 undergraduate students from Noida, Uttar Pradesh was taken for this study. After removing the outliers, the data used for the study was that of 293 participants. The sample comprised both girls (150) and boys (143). The mean age of participants was 19.25. Convenience sampling was used for collecting data wherein participants who were easily assessable and voluntarily participated took part in the study.

Tools

1. Need for Popularity Scale

It is a 12 items Likert-type scale developed by Santor and colleagues in the year 2000. The participant is needed to rate the items from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). The scale has fairly good psychometric properties with the reliability of the original scale being 0.91 and the Spanish version of the scale has the reliability of 0.93 (Romera et al., 2021). Examples of the items include - "I've neglected some friends because of what other people might think" and "I have done things to make me more popular, even when it meant doing something I would not usually do".

2. Core self-evaluation scale

Core Self Evaluation Scale comprises 12 items and each item has 5 options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale was developed by Timothy A Judge and colleagues. It is a reliable scale for assessing one's evaluation of self (Judge et al., 2003). The examples of the item in the scale include "When I try, I generally succeed."

3. Social media engagement Questionnaire

The social media engagement questionnaire was developed by Przybylski and colleagues in the year 2013. It has five items and the response anchors range from 0 (not one day) to 7 (every day). The questionnaire has a reliability coefficient ranging from 0.82 to 0.89. An example of the item is – "How often did you use social media in the 15 minutes before you go to sleep?"

Procedure

The topic of the study was finalized by reviewing past research and understanding the gaps within the research. After the topic finalization, standardized tools were found relevant to the variables. Google Forms was used for data collection. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and filled out an informed consent before participating. Data was collected from 304 participants through the means of Google Forms. Outliers were removed to minimise the bias and maximise the result's accuracy. Result analysis was done through SPSS and SPSS Amos.

RESULT

Table 1

Table 1 indicates the sample size that participated in the study, the mean score attained for each questionnaire along with standard deviation score.

Variables	N	M	SD
1. CSE	293	37.39	6.64
2. SME	293	17.25	10.77
3. NfP	293	2.96	1.14

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables of Interest.

Table 2

As observed from Table 2 all the pathways were significant except for the indirect effect thereby indicating partial mediation. As per the given output, the overall impact of social media engagement inclusive of the direct and indirect effect is -.12. The p-value, $0.0008 \leq 0.001$, therefore, implies a significant negative relationship between social media engagement and the need for core self-evaluation. The direct impact of social media engagement on core self-evaluation is -.13. The p-value, $0.0003 \leq 0.001$, therefore, implying a significant negative relationship between the two variables.

	Path coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value	95% CI lower bound	95% CI upper bound
Total effect	-.12	.04	-3.40	$\leq .001$	-.19	-.05
Direct effect	-.13	.04	-3.65	$\leq .001$	-.21	-.06
Indirect effect	.01	.01	1.13	$\geq .001$	-.01	.04

Mediation analysis

Overall, the result indicates SME has both direct as well as indirect impacts on CSE wherein the indirect effect is mediating through the variable NfP. Thus, H03, stating that the need for popularity plays a significant mediating role in social media engagement and self-evaluation is correct.

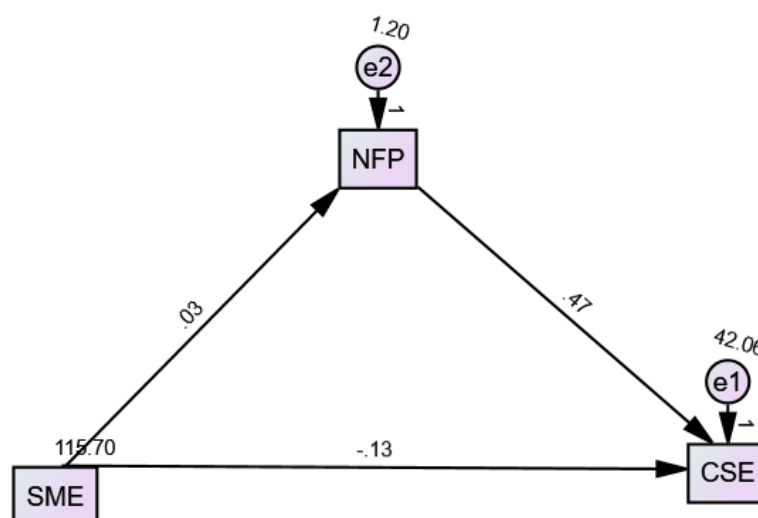


Figure 3. Path diagram of the relationship between SME, NfP and CSE

As observed from the above diagram, a weak path coefficient of 0.03 is found between SME and NfP implying the relationship between two variables is positive and weak. The path coefficient between NfP and CSE is 0.47 implying a moderately strong positive correlation between the two variables. The path coefficient

between SME and CSE is $-.13$ implying a weak and negative correlation between the two variables. As the path coefficient value for SME and CSE is negative whereas for SME and NfP as well as NfP and CSE is positive, inconsistent mediation is observed.

Discussion

The present research aimed to study social media engagement, the need for popularity and self-evaluation among young adults. The focus of the study was on undergraduate students of Noida as the three variables SME, CSE and NfP have been rarely investigated amongst the Indian population.

As per the current study's findings, a significant, weak and negative, correlation was observed between social media engagement and core self-evaluation. The current research was the first one to examine the association between SME and CSE. Regression analysis implied that social media engagement predicts core self-evaluation. The findings are congruent with previous research which showed that usage of social media correlates with depression, anxiety and psychological distress (Keles et al. 2019). Another study (Jiang & Ngien, 2020) found that increasing the use of social media can lead to social comparison and further lead to social anxiety.

A positive significant and weak correlation was observed between social media engagement and the need for popularity implying that if one variable increases, the likelihood of another variable moving in the same direction also increases. It can be inferred that if young adults use more social media, the probability of them wanting to become popular or vice versa is also there. In past, findings of similar studies showed that as adolescents' popularity on Instagram increased, their risk of developing an addiction to Instagram also enhanced (Longobardi et al. 2020).

As per the results of the mediation analysis, a partial and inconsistent mediating role of the need for popularity was observed between social media engagement and core self-evaluation. The findings revealed that the need for popularity is an important variable for explaining the association between young adults' social media use and self-evaluation. At the same time, the findings shed light on the need for exploring more such variables that can also contribute towards the explanation between SME and CSE.

Limitations include collecting data using convenience sampling. While this method was an efficient and swift data collection technique, it might have led to some selection biases that can limit the generalisability of these findings. While the study acted as a stepping stone towards the understanding of the association between SME, CSE and NP, it needs to be acknowledged that the data was collected from only a limited sample and in future a higher sample can be considered.

The study as a whole turned out helpful in understanding the association between social media engagement, core self-evaluation and the need for popularity. With the ever-increasing popularity of social media amongst users all around the globe, it is crucial to examine how it is impacting our day-to-day life. As per the findings of the study, it can be implied that mindful use of social media should be promoted because the findings showed an inverse relationship between social media engagement and core self-evaluation. Zebroski (2019) suggested

a mindful social media usage leads to minimizing the problematic use of Instagram and therefore decreased harm to the mental health of users. All those who engage with social media, also the teachers, parents and counsellors can benefit from the findings of this study by learning the impact of social media engagement on the lives of people. Steps can be developed for the healthy and mindful use of social media; more research can be done to better understand this concept.

The current study also allows taking a step forward in research and developing plans that help young adults use social media with awareness such that healthy well-being is maintained and promoted. The study aspires to benefit researchers by contributing towards some relatively less researched concepts with regards to SME such as CSE and NfP, especially in the context of the Indian population. This would be the first study done with these three variables together. The findings of this research can help mental health professionals understand the various facets of social media engagement and how one's personality is influenced by those. Active social media users can also become more aware of its impact on their lives through the medium of this study.

Conclusion

Understanding the impact of social media engagement on the young adult population can help in becoming more aware of our actions and their consequences. Various studies have been conducted on social media engagement, the need for popularity and core self-evaluation individually or with other variables however not many studies could be found with the three variables being studied together.

The findings of the present study revealed that social media engagement and core self-evaluation are inversely proportional. Thus, it is suggested to minimise the use of social media for enhancing one's evaluation of self. Further, an inconsistent partial mediation was found between the three variables. It was found that while NP is a crucial factor in explaining the association between SME and CSE, there may be other factors involved in this complex relationship.

It can be concluded that the current study contributed towards a better understanding of the three variables individually and their association. Further, there is a lot of scope for studying and exploring diverse variables that may be involved in influencing the relationship between social media engagement and core self-evaluation.

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