



Narcissistic Behavior and Subjective Well-Being: A Study in Emerging Adulthood Instagram Users

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Article Info

Keywords:
Subjective Well-Being,
Narcissistic Behavior,
Emerging Adulthood,
Instagram User

Abstract

This study aims to determine the relationship between narcissistic behavior and subjective well-being in emerging adulthood Instagram users. The method used in this research is quantitative with Pearson Product-Moment correlational analysis. The sampling technique used non-probability sampling technique with incidental sampling technique. The data collection method was carried out by distributing questionnaires online. The subjects of this study amounted to 115 emerging adulthood Instagram users. The data in this study were obtained with The Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) scale, The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) scale, and The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) scale. The results of this study indicate that the correlation coefficient (r) value is 0.107 and the significance value is 0.107. (p) is 0.253 where the value is greater than the specified significance level of 0.05. So it can be concluded that narcissistic behavior does not have a significant relationship with subjective well-being in emerging adulthood Instagram users. Thus, the alternative hypothesis or H_a in this study is rejected.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on data from APJII (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia) in 2024, internet users in Indonesia will reach around 221 million people, or around 79.50% of the total population of Indonesia. Of the many internet users, most use the internet to access social media. One of the most widely used social media platforms today is Instagram, which allows users to freely share photos and videos, as well as engage with others through features such as commenting on posts. According to the results of APJII survey data in 2024, which involved around 8,720 respondents throughout Indonesia, 29.68% of participants used Instagram, placing it as the fourth most used application. In addition, Generation Z occupies the first position of the most Instagram users in Indonesia according to the survey with 51.90% of the overall respondents, and this Generation Z includes those aged 12 to 27 years old.

Based on Arnett's (2000) theory, the majority of individuals belonging to Generation Z are currently in the developmental phase known as emerging adulthood, a transitional phase spanning the ages of 18-25, which is theoretically and empirically distinct from adolescence and early adulthood. The sizable number of Instagram users within this demographic is reinforced by the platform's function in enabling social interaction online, allowing them to maintain connections and stay informed. In using Instagram, individuals are expected to feel satisfied after sharing content, regardless of others' responses, this is in line with research conducted by Sari et al. (2019) which states that Instagram in the aspect of entertainment satisfaction has a fairly high score when someone plays it. However, if there is no good self-control, excessive engagement with Instagram has been empirically linked to the development of maladaptive behaviors, particularly addictive tendencies. In addition, frequent use has been associated with increased narcissistic traits, as demonstrated in prior studies (Fauziah, 2020; Kircaburun et al., 2019; Laeli et al., 2018).

An individual's experience while using Instagram can serve as one of the contributing factors in evaluating their life subjectively. The frequency of use and the nature of interactions on this platform—such as receiving likes, positive comments, or merely viewing others' posts—may shape one's self-perception and overall life evaluation (Indrawati, 2021). These subjective evaluations, whether positive or negative, are referred to as the concept of subjective well-being. According to Diener (2000), subjective well-being refers to the extent of an individual's perceived well-being, based on their personal appraisal of life experiences. This includes both cognitive and affective components, such as life satisfaction, engagement, and emotional responses—ranging from joy to sadness—toward life events. Moreover, subjective well-being encompasses satisfaction with various life domains, including work, interpersonal relationships, health, leisure, meaning and purpose in life, and other essential areas.

In the context of Instagram use, individuals may encounter both positive and negative experiences. While positive feedback such as likes and supportive comments can enhance well-being, negative experiences—such as receiving harsh comments, experiencing cyberbullying, or engaging in social comparison—can negatively impact an individual's mental health and subjective well-being (Longobardi et al., 2020). Empirical studies have shown that problematic Instagram use is associated with various psychological issues, including loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Andreassen et al., 2017; Yurdagül et al., 2021). These negative outcomes may be particularly pronounced among individuals in the emerging adulthood stage. For many in this stage, Instagram functions as a medium for identity construction and social validation. However, excessive engagement may lead to addiction and, in some cases, the development of narcissistic behavior. This occurs as users seek to fulfill their need for recognition by showcasing achievements and receiving validation through likes and positive comments (Andreassen et al., 2017; Gao et al., 2017).

Back (2018) conceptualize narcissism through the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC), which offers a dual-process framework for understanding narcissistic tendencies. Narcissistic Admiration refers to an individual's efforts to create and maintain a positive self-image

through recognition and admiration from others. In contrast, Narcissistic Rivalry describes defensive and competitive actions aimed at protecting the self-image from threats. These two mechanisms go hand in hand, with individuals seeking social rewards and recognition to reinforce their self-image, while acting defensively to protect themselves from social failure.

Individuals who use Instagram and show indications of narcissistic behavior may begin to develop a tendency to love themselves too much, considering all their Instagram posts and profiles the best (Moon et al., 2016). This sense of self-love may be interpreted as a form of life satisfaction, which in turn contributes to the achievement of subjective well-being. According to Diener and Ryan (2009), subjective well-being is a term that describes an individual's level of well-being based on their subjective assessment of their life. This assessment includes positive and negative evaluations related to life satisfaction, interests, and attachments, as well as affective reactions such as pleasure or sadness to events. In addition, subjective well-being also involves satisfaction with various aspects of life, including work, interpersonal relationships, health, recreation, life meaning and purpose, and other important domains.

The use of Instagram can indeed be a means to fulfill the need for security and love to be used as a measure of happiness or life satisfaction for an individual, especially when individuals share their activities and receive positive comments from followers. When this happens consistently, individuals may feel comfortable, valued and loved through interactions on platform. However, if these feelings are overly reinforced, the individual may find themselves feeling at risk of developing an unhealthy sense of self-love that leads to narcissistic behavior. This reliance on external validation shows how Instagram use can affect subjective well-being while triggering the dynamics of narcissistic behavior. The ability to exercise self-control is theoretically essential in regulating narcissistic tendencies, as it enables individuals to inhibit impulsive behaviors and manage the desire for excessive admiration, which are central features of maladaptive narcissism.

However, individuals feel pressured to project a true self-image and seek validation from others as a result of the pressure to share personal content and gain attention from others, which can be related to narcissistic behavior in a person, when individuals derive excessive satisfaction from positive comments and social validation on Instagram, such reinforcement may contribute to the development of narcissistic traits. While there are short-term feelings of happiness and favorable reactions from this, there will also be long-term unhappiness and detrimental effects on mental health. While responding positively to Instagram posts may increase one's subjective satisfaction in the short term, it is important to consider the long-term effects. The increased pressure to project a perfect image can have adverse effects on students' mental health such as causing stress, worry, feelings of envy, and leading to narcissistic behavior.

This research is grounded in the premise that narcissistic behavior may influence an individual's level of subjective well-being, particularly among adults who actively use Instagram. In practice, many users experience difficulties in regulating their online behavior, which may reflect heightened narcissistic tendencies and, in turn, lower subjective well-being. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine whether higher levels of narcissism are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being, or conversely, whether individuals with greater subjective well-being exhibit reduced narcissistic tendencies.

METHOD

This study uses a type of quantitative research with a correlational quantitative research design in analyzing the relationship between narcissistic behavior and subjective well-being. The population in this study consists of individuals in the emerging adulthood stage, defined as those aged 18 to 25 years (Arnett, 2000), who are active Instagram users. This age group is selected because individuals in this developmental phase are undergoing identity exploration and are particularly sensitive to social evaluation. As such, they are more likely to seek validation through social media, making them more

vulnerable to the psychological effects of Instagram use, including the development of narcissistic traits and fluctuations in subjective well-being. Sample size in this research consists of 115 respondents. This study employs incidental sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their availability and conformity to specific criteria relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2016).

The independent variable used in this study is narcissistic behavior, Back et al. (2013) offer a new way of understanding narcissism which he divides into two parts: admiration and rivalry. The basic idea is that people with narcissistic behavior try to maintain themselves in two different ways. First, by trying to be liked by many people (self-promotion), and second, by trying to avoid social failure (self-protection). As well as the dependent variable in this study is subjective well-being (SWB), or an assessment of each individual subjectively about how their respective lives are which can be in the form of positive assessments such as well-being, happiness, or negative assessments of one's life (Diener & Ryan, 2009).

Data were collected using The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), and The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) to measure SWB, and The Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) scale to measure narcissistic behavior. In this study, the data analysis technique used was parametric inferential statistics. To test the hypothesis in this study which is an associative hypothesis, the statistic used is Pearson Product Moment correlation using SPSS software. However, before carrying out hypothesis testing, normality and linearity tests were carried out first, because the use of parametric statistics requires that each variable being analyzed has a normal distribution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the collected data, the majority of emerging adulthood Instagram users in this study fall within the moderate category for both narcissistic behavior and subjective well-being. Specifically, 97% of respondents displayed moderate levels of narcissistic behavior, and 65% showed moderate levels of subjective well-being. The data is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Description of research subjects by category (N= 115)

Variables	Classification	Total	Percentage
Subjective Well-Being	Low	19	17 %
	Moderate	75	65 %
	High	21	28 %
Narcissistic Behavior	Low	4	3 %
	Moderate	111	97 %
	High	0	0 %

This suggests that most participants experience a balanced self-view and a fair level of life satisfaction, although occasional negative emotions may still be present (Sintha & Aulia Adnans, 2024; Wan et al., 2024). In addition, referring to the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (Back et al., 2013), individuals with moderate narcissistic traits may still seek social recognition, but this need does not dominate their behavior to the extent that it impairs their functioning. They are typically able to maintain a healthy adaptation to their environment without displaying excessive competitiveness or hostility.

Before carrying out hypothesis testing, normality and linearity tests were first carried out. This is because the use of parametric statistics requires that each variable analyzed has a normal and linear distribution (Sugiyono, 2016). The assumption test results can be seen in the following table:

Tabel 2. Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
SWB	0.066	115	0.200
NARQ	0.069	115	0.200

Table 2 shows that the significance value for both variables is $p = 0.200$. Since this value is $p > 0.05$, it can be concluded that both variables are normally distributed.

Tabel 3. Linearity test

ANOVA Table			
			Sig.
SWB * NARQ	Between Groups	(Combined)	0.174
		Linearity	0.226
		Deviation from Linearity	0.178

In Table 3, it can be seen that the significance value of Linearity is 0.226 and Deviation from Linearity is 0.178, which means that the significance value is above 0.005 so it can be concluded that the two variables are linear or on a straight line. Then the normality and linearity tests confirmed that the data met the assumptions required for parametric analysis. Because the data in this study have a normal distribution and are linear, hypothesis testing is carried out using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test to determine whether there is a relationship between subjective well-being and narcissistic behavior in emerging adulthood individuals who use Instagram. This hypothesis testing was analyzed with the help of SPSS software, with the following results:

Tabel 4. Hypothesis test results

Correlation			
		NARQ	SWB
Subjective Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	1	0.107
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.253
	N	115	115
Narcissistic Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	0.107	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.253	
	N	115	115

Based on Table 4, the hypothesis testing revealed a non-significant relationship between narcissistic behavior and subjective well-being ($r = 0.107$, $p = 0.253$). This indicates that, within this sample, narcissistic behavior do not significantly influence how individuals evaluate their subjective well-being. Although no significant correlation was found, a more nuanced interpretation is necessary. The moderate scores on both variables suggest that while narcissistic behavior is present, it may not be intense enough to disrupt subjective well-being. This aligns with the theoretical understanding that narcissistic traits may manifest differently depending on the underlying motives—whether driven by admiration or rivalry (Back et al., 2013). Individuals who engage in self-promotion for admiration may still maintain psychological balance, whereas those driven by rivalry tend to exhibit more

maladaptive outcomes. Additionally, narcissistic behavior is influenced by a range of internal and external factors beyond subjective well-being, including self-esteem, self-control, and social comparison (Lestari & Wulanyani, 2024). Likewise, high levels of subjective well-being may result from various sources such as strong social relationships, personal achievements, or emotional resilience, rather than Instagram use alone. The existence of insignificant conditions in the relationship between each variable could have occurred due to other factors that are more relevant for both of them to be related.

From a theoretical perspective, subjective well-being is influenced by various factors, and narcissistic behavior represents only one of the many variables that may contribute to its formation. There are many other internal and external factors that can cause the emergence of a person's subjective well-being, including physical health, income level, quality of social relationships, and personality traits. According to Tov and Diener (2013), these factors interact in complex ways to influence how individuals evaluate and experience their lives. Some respondents' relatively high subjective well-being suggests that factors beyond Instagram use may also contribute to their well-being. For example, their life satisfaction may stem from strong social relationships, personal achievements, or emotional stability. In these situations, using Instagram may simply be a way for them to express themselves or have fun, without having a direct impact on their psychological condition.

This finding aligns with the study by Rahayu and Hamidah (2022), who reported that subjective well-being was not significantly related to social media use, while narcissistic tendencies were positively associated with TikTok use, accounting for 8.1% of the variance in narcissism levels. Although the study did not directly examine the relationship between SWB and narcissistic behavior, the present research addresses this gap by explicitly investigating the connection between these two variables. Although the results showed no significant relationship, they contribute to a deeper understanding of how narcissistic tendencies may not necessarily correspond with levels of subjective well-being, particularly within the context of emerging adulthood and social media use. This pattern reinforces the possibility that SWB and narcissism can move separately, especially in the context of interaction with social media.

The absence of a relationship between SWB and narcissistic behavior in this study and the finding of no relationship between SWB and the intensity of Tiktok or social media use in Rahayu and Hamidah (2022) study confirms the complexity of their dynamics. External factors such as the type of social media platform, demographic characteristics, and others may moderate or mediate the relationship. Masciantonio et al. (2023) also conducted a similar study, discussing the comparison of passive vs active use on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter with the subjective well-being of users. The results show that the intensity or style of Instagram use does not influence respondents' subjective well-being scores.

These findings contrast with those of Letari et al. (2020) and Trissandy and Widyastuti (2021), who reported a significant negative relationship between subjective well-being and narcissistic behavior. The difference in this study's results may be attributed to several factors, including differences in the theoretical framework used and the characteristics of participants, who are individuals aged 18–25 in Indonesia with diverse backgrounds. These differences in subject characteristics can affect the results, as factors such as academic environment, social pressure, and level of psychological understanding can differ between subject groups. Furthermore, there are differences in sampling techniques that produce different data distributions, which in turn affect the results of the analysis. In this study, the distribution of respondents data tends to be homogeneous with a predominance of moderate scores on both variables, which may cause statistical analysis to show no significant relationship.

CONCLUSION

Based on the previous discussion, it can be concluded that this study shows the results of the majority of respondents, namely emerging adulthood Instagram users, have narcissistic behavior at a moderate level, meaning that respondents have indications of narcissistic behavior, but not to a severe or disturbing level. In addition, the description of subjective well-being among emerging adulthood Instagram users indicates that it falls within the moderate category. This suggests that, in general, the respondents were able to evaluate their lives positively and experienced a moderate level of life satisfaction. However, the experience of negative emotions is still quite present in their lives, so that the subjective well-being they feel is not fully optimal. And the results of the analysis show that there is no relationship between subjective well-being and narcissistic behavior in emerging adulthood Instagram users, or the hypothesis was rejected as the correlation was not statistically significant.

Of course, this research still has several limitations that need to be considered, such as the data collection process was carried out online, so that the researcher did not have full control over the situation or conditions when the respondent filled out the questionnaire. This opens up the possibility of respondents filling out non-seriously or carelessly, which can affect the accuracy of the data and cause the results to not fully represent the actual condition of the respondents, a narrow scope of focus, because it only involves Instagram users as a social media context, so that the views obtained do not represent the perspectives of other wider social media users, and this study has not considered other variables outside the main research variables that have the potential to mediate the relationship between subjective well-being and narcissistic behavior in emerging adulthood Instagram users. So for future researchers it is recommended to use moderating variables in revealing the relationship between subjective well-being and narcissistic behavior, because there is a possibility that there are intermediary factors that affect the strength or direction of the relationship. In addition, future researchers can also add control variables such as the intensity of Instagram use.

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