

Chapter 12

Narcissism as a Predictor of Facebook Users' Privacy Concern, Vigilance, and Exposure to Risk

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ABSTRACT

A model is developed and tested to explain the relationships among narcissism, privacy concern, vigilance, and exposure to risk on Facebook, with age and gender as controlling variables. Two important constructs are conceptualized and measured in this research. Facebook exposure is defined as the opportunity for privacy and security breaches on Facebook. Facebook vigilance is the extent to which consumers stay focused, attentive, and alert to potential security and privacy risks on Facebook by restricting who can access and post to their Facebook accounts. Data from a survey of 286 adult Facebook users in the U.S. support the hypothesized relationships in the model. Results suggest that narcissism is related to increased Facebook exposure and lower Facebook vigilance, despite greater stated concern for privacy and security. Furthermore, females and younger users have greater risk exposure compared to males and older users. Implications of the findings and future research directions are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

McAfee® listed social networking as one of the top two threats to personal privacy for 2010 (Horn 2010). In 2008, almost 10 million Americans were victims of identity theft, and cybercrime increased almost sevenfold between 2001 and 2009. Social networking platforms (e.g., Facebook) and cloud computing (storing information online) provide cybercriminals with additional means of attack (Ramsey & Venkatesan 2010). Social network usage occurs in two out of three online households in the U.S. (Social Insecurity 2010). Furthermore, the amount of information and contributed content about identity posted on social networks and freely shared on the Internet has increased, thus, reducing security and privacy. Parameswaran and Whinston (2007) suggested that social computing should be a priority for researchers and business leaders.

Consumers face two primary types of risks from posting content on social media platforms. *Security risk* involves a breach by unauthorized persons that can cause financial or other personal harm (Everett-Church 2009; Merkow & Breithaupt, 2006). *Privacy risk* results from the sharing of information with third parties, such as marketing companies (Baltzan & Phillips, 2011). Use of social media, such as Facebook, increases consumers' exposure to security and privacy risks. In fact, Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, declared that the "age of privacy is over" (Sarrel, 2010). As of December 2011, Facebook had more than 845 million active users, of which half log on every day (Facebook 2012a). Because of its greater popularity and ability to engage users among the various social networking platforms, this study focused on Facebook and its users.

Theories of narcissism (Raskin and Terry, 1988) and vigilance (Parasuraman, 1987) are used as a framework for developing a model of user attitudes and behavior on social networks. Although Facebook makes it easy to share information, it also has a number of protections in the form of privacy settings that consumers can use to reduce their security and privacy risks. While consumers often report a strong privacy concern, their vigilance in reducing risk is often lacking. A possible inhibitor to vigilance is *narcissism*, a personality trait associated with an excessive focus on the self. Narcissistic people tend to have an inflated self-concept and engage in activities to affirm the positive self-views (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Narcissism has been shown to correlate with social media use and with generation of self-promoting content on these media (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Because narcissistic consumers are focused on disseminating content about themselves, they may interact with social media more frequently and in a greater variety of ways that could put them at a higher risk than less narcissistic consumers.

For the purposes of this research, exposure to security and privacy risk on Facebook (Facebook Exposure) is defined as the opportunity for privacy and security breaches. The more interactions a user has with Facebook, for example, accessing Facebook over a mobile phone, the higher the risk of exposure. In addition, the number of friends a user has can create a multiplier effect on risk because friends of friends may also be able to access a user's information. If narcissists exhibit greater Facebook Exposure and less Facebook Vigilance, they may put themselves at greater risk than less narcissistic consumers.

This empirical study extends prior research by (1) developing and testing a model of consumer exposure to security and privacy risks on Facebook, (2) conceptualizing and measuring Facebook Vigilance and Facebook Exposure and demonstrating their importance in understanding consumer risk, (3) examining the impact of controlling variables of age and gender, (4) discussing implications of the study results, and (5) suggesting directions for future research. The model was tested using existing measures of Concern for Security and Privacy (Dinev & Hart, 2004) and Narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988), as well as new measures for Facebook vigilance and Facebook exposure that were developed in this study.

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