

Impact of Social Media on the Vanity Level of Youngsters in India

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This paper is an attempt to measure the impact of social media on the vanity level of youngsters in India. An experimental research was conducted on a controlled group of 40 participants with an average age of 23 years. Netemeyer's vanity scale was administered on the participants and their vanity was measured. A month later, the participants in the research were put under controlled conditions for two hours and exposed to social media. They were instructed to log into their social media accounts and instructed to engage into activities like updating their status, uploading new photographs, reading comments and going through the number of likes which had been made on their earlier loaded statuses and photographs. Post two hours, their vanity level was measured. Data was analysed using paired sample t tests as well as confirmatory factor analysis and comparison was made along the factors of Netemeyer's Vanity Scale pre and post the exposure to social media activity.

As per *The Hindu*, India's leading daily, 'Every third person in an Indian city today is a youth. In about seven years, the median individual in India will be 29 years, very likely a city-dweller, making it the youngest country in the world'. This has often been termed as the 'demographic dividend' of the nation because the youth population holds the potential to make India the largest consumer base and the biggest labour market in the world. But this exponential number holds a hollow promise unless it is equipped with the right mix of education and skills. One of the prime parameters to provide the necessary inputs to the youngsters is the appropriate infrastructure which includes access to information technology that opens avenues for knowledge acquisition and exposure to the global scenario. In spite of an exponential growth in the number of internet users in India, the spread is limited to the urban areas and over 90 per cent of its population is currently not connected to the internet (McKinsey & Co., 2012). Therefore it is the urban youth who have access to the internet and their use of internet determines the direction of their growth and development.

Internet usage of the youth is focused to social networking sites through which they socialize with their immediate and extended environment by posting pictures, updating statuses exchanging statuses, putting up comments and feedback on others' activities. All these activities are targeted to build and establish social relationships for which the users often project a glamorous self. The feedback on their social media activities impacts the users 'self' and 'social image' which governs their output and performance as potential workforce.

The current paper is an attempt to measure the impact of social media sites on the vanity levels of youngsters through experimental research. The results from the paper can help provide strong grounds for arguments about the impact of social media and can help in policy making, policing and counseling the youngsters.

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Literature Review

McFarland (2013), carried an article which detailed the impact of social media on human activities by saying, 'Social media have conquered the world, racking up more than a billion users and even helping to unseat governments. The one thing this style of communication can't topple: human vanity.' As per a study conducted by, Stefanone, et.al. (2011), there were differences in the posts made on social media by men and women and the author commented about his research through a news release saying, "[I]t is disappointing to me that in the year 2011 so many young women continue to assert their self worth via their physical appearance — in this case, by posting photos of themselves on Facebook as a form of advertisement. Perhaps this reflects the distorted value pegged to women's looks throughout the popular culture and in reality programming from 'The Bachelor' to 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians.' (Raon, 2011). Titlow in an article on readwrite.com (2013) about social media and narcissism, writes "It's probably both that higher narcissism causes people to use social media in narcissistic ways, and that some social media causes higher narcissism, But it's definitely a two-way street."

It is a well established fact that social media networks have a distinct impact on the opinion, values and behavior of the users. There understanding of the self and the outside is shaped and patterned by social media. Academic and popular literature supports and similar view.

Concept of Self and Altered Self

Literature is rife with discussion about personality and its relation to consumer's behaviour (Kassrjian and Sheffet 1981, Foxall and Goldsmith 1989, Mooradian and Olver 1994, Haugtvedt, Petty, Cacioppo and Steidly 1988, Bearden et al 1989 etc). The theories by these researchers on personality and consumer behaviour have analysed the relation between consumer purchases and consumption. Consumption is presented as a projection of the consumer's personality. His consumption pattern reflects his inner desires and motivations which has been explained by researchers as the core essence to the theory of the self.

The notion of self has been studied by Rosenberg (1979) and he purports self to be a cumulate of an individual's thoughts and feelings. Here, as literature suggests, self is referred to as an object. Self has multiple layers. (Morgan 1993; Ericksen & Sirgy 1992; Sirgy et.al 1991 and Markus and Nurius 1986.). These researchers define the multiple layers of self into three broad categories of actual self, ideal self and social self with sharper sub-types as ideal social self, expected self, situational self, extended self and possible selves.

The discussion on the self-theory was complemented by the concept of altering the self. The self can possibly be altered to create a new self while the individual preserves the existing self or ensures least change in the prevalence of existing self. Later on, the alteration of self came to be closely related to the idea of personal vanity.

Vanity

Durvasala (2001) in his study has suggested that the concept of vanity goes back to Aristotle who said that it the vain who reflect a blown-up image of the self though they are often found not being worthy of it. Philip (2012) also said that vanity is rather too esteemed as a social passion and a bond of union among man. Vanity has been conceptualized on one extreme as originating in the sexual struggle (Battistelli, 1929) as well as the inclination for self-expression originating from the desire to increase one's sense of importance (Grau, 1928).

The discussion on the different forms of vanity is also as varied as the discussion on its origin. Fields like sociology, philosophy and psychology suggests that there are two basic themes

related to vanity: physical appearance and achievement. Vanity has been studied extensively by Netemeyer along with a group of his co-researchers conceptualized vanity as a variable with distinct individual differences on two dimensions – physical and achievement and therefore they categorized vanity as a trait into physical vanity and achievement vanity Netemeyer et al, (1995). As the term suggests, physical vanity is an extreme concern towards drawing a positive opinion about one's physical appearance and similarly achievement vanity is an excessive concern about one's material and individual achievements. Achievement vanity relates to the possessions and acquirements which an individual has. It could include all facets and aspects like fashionable clothes, affiliations to elite clubs and associations. The rationale for understanding vanity through these measures is that one's approach to physical and achievement aspects feed and helps to further an individual's vanity.

Vain Self and Social Networking Sites

Owing to the growing information technology boom, Social Networking Sites have emerged as a new medium through which young people develop and construct ideas of the self. A SNS is characteristically dynamic rather than static; the online content can be altered and adjusted, added to and taken away (Guzzetti, 2006). Essentially, a SNS is a “nonymous”, or user known, online website where users create and update profiles in order to communicate personal information to others (Hum et al., 2011, p. 1829). These sites can further be explained as networked publics as they move the act of public socializing from face to face interaction to the online domain (Parker & Boyd, 2010).

Four characteristics are important in distinguishing SNS from communication methods of the past: SNS are persistent, searchable, replicable and scalable (Parker & Boyd, 2010). Respectively, the information shared on SNS will be saved long-term, individuals can be easily found by name and identifying characteristics, news and information can be shared and copied easily, and the material on the sites is not bound to specific domains—SNS can reach people all over the world (Parker & Boyd, 2010).

Goffman (1959), detailed the idea of self presentation to bring out the fact that self is a unified whole which is held and presented through components like presentation and performance. This attribute of having a multiple unified self was in theorized during the era when offline communication was prevalent. Over a period of time, presentation and performance of the self has only compounded as the online communication has held a stronger and deeper hold on inter-personal human communication.

In idea of self-presentation was further developed by Manning (1992) who distinguished two distinct expressions of the vain individual—unconscious and instinctive responses in the form of gestures etc and a deliberate conscious attempt where specific words, symbols are used to portray a specific persona. The former expressions are largely unplanned actions or gestures which are naturalized as a part of an individual responses but the latter, deliberate conscious attempts are fundamentally a ‘persona-sculpting strategy’ (Manning, 1992) Over the years, individuals have adapted their strategies, becoming savvier in deploying new ‘technologies of self’.

Self-expression aided through technology on the SNS's has fuelled the performance and presentation of the *self*, as measurement matrix is added to every act of self-presentation in the form of number of followers, likes, comments, re-tweets etc. Such quantitatively measured popularity in public domain would have a distinctly to more conscious acts of self-staging and one of the ways in which such tendencies get manifested is in celebrity's online accounts.

Few ways through which the SNS network can inflate a person's self-image is through mediums like LinkedIn and Facebook. One of these sites concern professional achievement, whereas

Facebook is about one's personal self. Both through visual interfaces and textual write-up by the self and testimonials from others, these two mediums serve users' desire for self-expression leading to candid and often inflated presentation of the self.

Facebook and Youngsters

In a report by Warman (2013), quoted Marc Zuckerberg's response to Facebook's new feature of 'Timeline', mentioned, 'Timeline is the story of your life. It has three pieces: all your stories, all your apps, and a new way to express who you are'. Timeline's format is organized as a narrative biography, a story chronicling how life has been up to the present day by rearranging bits and pieces uploaded previously. The resulting narrative is a construction in hindsight, a retroactive ordering of life events at one moment in time. The opening image requires a large-size eye-catcher, friends become big pictures, and many posts carry much larger versions of pictures than originally posted.

As research has demonstrated, Facebook users have gradually become more skilled in the techniques of audience appraisal and personal branding (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Some psychologists (Mehdizadeh, 2010) have argued that young adults with low self-esteem can be correlated with a greater amount of self-promotional content on their Facebook pages. Facebook.com has reported a staggering 733 per cent increase in the number of active Facebook users from 2007 to 2008. In the second quarter of 2015 the number of active monthly users of Facebook is 1.49 billion worldwide. On the basis of the literature review, the current study tries to measure the impact of social media on the vanity level of youngsters and activities triggered by social media exposure.

Hypothesis

The concept of vanity has received attention in relation to consumer behaviour and media-induced behaviour as a response to advertising. Advertisers have always targeted aspects of vanity like physical concern and physical view to attract consumers towards particular products. However, little attention has been paid to vanity induced by the new forms of media like social media usage, particularly in the Indian context. Given the fact that youngsters in India today are significantly using social media, such a study can tap a sizeable portion of Indian population's attitude towards vanity dimensions and measure their consumption aptitude for advertising through social media. The four specific sub-dimensions of the vanity are: (i) physical-concern (five items); (ii) physical-view (six items); (iii) achievement-concern (five items); and (iv) achievement-view (five items).

Usage of social media is indicated as a way to enhance self-esteem or vanity by existing literature. An attempt was made to test how the four sub-dimensions of vanity are affected by exposure to social media. Based on the items noted above the following research questions are framed:

RQ1: Does exposure to social media enhance a youngsters' physical view.

RQ2: Does exposure to social media enhance a youngsters' physical concern.

RQ1: Does exposure to social media enhance a youngsters' achievement view.

RQ1: Does exposure to social media enhance a youngsters' achievement concern.

Methodology

Based on the hypothesis that social media usage impacts a change in the vanity levels of youngsters, an experimental research was designed for a convenience sample of 40 participants. The participants were chosen from a management school and belonged to the age group of 21-25.

The study was devised in two different stages to see the impact of social media on vanity or self-esteem. At the first stage, the Netemeyer scale of vanity was administered on the sample to capture their vanity scoring. An excessive concern for physical appearance and a positive view of

one's personal appearance, as well as an excessive concern for achievement and a positive view of personal achievement are the four dimensions measured. In the initial stage, the standard Netemeyer scale was administered on the students. The scale tries to assess their physical appearance and achievement vanity through a set of 21 questions. The scoring pattern was a standard 5-point Likert scale from One anchored as Strongly Agree (SA) to 5, anchored as Strongly Disagree. Data was captured and tabulated.

At the second stage, after a significant gap of 30 days, the same sample was put under controlled conditions for two hours and exposed to Facebook. They were instructed to log into their Facebook accounts and engage into activities like updating their status, uploading new photographs, reading comments and going through the number of likes which had been made on their earlier loaded statuses and photographs. Post the time, their vanity level was measured using the same Netemeyer's vanity scale and data was recorded.

Analysis

The subsequent analysis of the data was done using sample pair t-test as well as confirmatory factor analysis to see the relationship between vanity and usage of social media.

Table 1. Paired samples t-test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Q1 – Q1P	-.2000	1.0908	.1725	-.5488	.1488	-1.160	39	.253
Pair 2	Q2 – Q2P	-.0750	.8286	.1310	-.3400	.1900	-.572	39	.570
Pair 3	Q3 – Q3P	-.1000	.9819	.1553	-.4140	.2140	-.644	39	.523
Pair 4	Q4 – Q4P	-.3000	.9661	.1528	-.6090	.0090	-1.964	39	.057
Pair 5	Q5 – Q5P	.0750	1.0225	.1617	-.2520	.4020	.464	39	.645
Pair 6	Q6 – Q6P	.2750	1.0857	.1717	-.0722	.6222	1.602	39	.117
Pair 7	Q7 – Q8P	-.1750	1.0595	.1675	-.5138	.1638	-1.045	39	.303
Pair 8	Q8 – Q8P	-.2250	1.1206	.1772	-.5834	.1334	-1.270	39	.212
Pair 9	Q9 – Q9P	-.1250	1.0175	.1609	-.4504	.2004	-.777	39	.442
Pair 10	Q10 – Q10P	-.1000	1.1048	.1747	-.4533	.2533	-.572	39	.570
Pair 11	Q11 – Q11P	-.3000	1.3243	.2094	-.7235	.1235	-1.433	39	.160
Pair 12	Q12 – Q12P	.1500	1.0513	.1662	-.1862	.4862	.902	39	.372
Pair 13	Q13 – Q13P	-.0750	.9443	.1493	-.3770	.2270	-.502	39	.618
Pair 14	Q14 – Q14P	.0250	1.3490	.2133	-.4064	.4564	.117	39	.907
Pair 15	Q15 – Q15P	-.3250	1.0473	.1656	-.6599	.0099	-1.963	39	.057
Pair 16	Q16 – Q16P	.1250	1.3241	.2094	-.2985	.5485	.597	39	.554
Pair 17	Q17 – Q17P	-.0500	.8756	.1384	-.3300	.2300	-.361	39	.720
Pair 18	Q18 – Q18P	.0250	1.2297	.1944	-.3683	.4183	.129	39	.898
Pair 19	Q19 – Q19P	-.1250	1.0175	.1609	-.4504	.2004	-.777	39	.442
Pair 20	Q20 – Q20P	-.2000	1.3048	.2063	-.6173	.2173	-.969	39	.338
Pair 21	Q21 – Q21P	.1500	1.1886	.1879	-.2301	.5301	.798	39	.430

Table 1 depicts the paired sample t-tests for the 21 questions. The test indicates the level of significance at .5. Wherever the value of the Sig.(2-tailed) is less than .5 there is no difference in the pre post condition. A value greater than .5 means of the pre and post sample are not equal. The paired sample t-test reveals that there is definitely reveals that there is difference in the pre and post level of the data which measured the vanity of youngsters.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis

Physical concern (PC)			
Code	Question	Pre	Post
PC	The way I look is extremely important to me	.214	.021
	I am very concerned about my appearance	.654	.652
	I would feel embarrassed if I was around people and did not look my best	.295	.761*
	Looking my best is worth the effort	.710	.732
	It is important that I always look good	.839	.713
Physical View			
PV	People notice how attractive I am	.481	.843
	My looks are very appealing to others	.578	.808
	People are envious of my good looks	.861	.747
	I am a very good-looking individual	.544	.588
	My body is sexually appealing	.671	.648
	I have the type of body that people want to look at	.158	.789
Achievement concern			
AC	Professional achievements are an obsession with me	.288	.450
	I want others to look up to me for my accomplishments	.563	.638
	I am more concerned with professional success than most people I know	.754	.370
	Achieving greater success than my peers is important to me	.467	.655
	I want my achievements to be recognized by others	.861	.574
Achievement view			
AV	In a professional sense, I am a very successful person	.696	.663
	My achievements are highly regarded by others	.693	.460
	I am an accomplished person.	.689	.901*
	I am a good example of professional success	.599	.817*
	Others wish they were as successful as I am	.698	.712

In the second part of the study, all four dimensions of Netemeyer's vanity scale along with their items were analysed at pre and post stages of exposure to social media. So, confirmatory factor analysis was done to assess the corresponding behaviour of the dimensions at these two stages (Table 2). Confirmatory factor analysis is used to test a hypothesis to check the presence of a relationship between the observed variables and its underlying latent construct(s).

Discussion

The present research investigated the constructs involved in vanity scale by an experimental, controlled condition research on a group of 40 postgraduate management programme students. The stages included were pre and post social media usage. The analysis by using multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis (Data recorded in Table 2) lent support to the research questions postulated on the use of social media and perceptions of physical appearance and personal achievement as well as achievement views.

Results of the study indicated that the vanity scale exhibited adequate factor loadings across all the dimensions. Data lent positive support to the research questions. The perceptions of physical appearance and physical view show a level of significance adequate to establish enhancement of vanity index on the minds of youngsters post usage of social media. Significant physical concern constructs like "I would feel embarrassed if I was around people and did not look my best" (Netemeyer, et.al, 1995) have received high impetus post social media usage which shows the need for self-presentation.

Compared to the excessive preoccupation with physical concerns and even physical views "I have the type of body that people want to look at" and "People notice how attractive I am" (Netemeyer, et.al, 1995), the achievement concerns and the achievement views, though, are not as robust. This can be explained by the fact that the sample size for the current study was a younger group. The average age of the group was around 23 years. This reflects the roles and responsibility expectation from young students in the Indian culture as in the Indian context, at an average age of 23; students are not in general expected to be adequately aware of their achievement goals and responsibilities. A different age group could have established conclusions which were likely to be more generalizable.

Another significant change in the post data is the change in achievement view data. While achievement concern data does not show much shift post social media usage, surprisingly few constructs in the achievement views data show the enhanced self ("I am an accomplished person, as well as I am a good example of professional success" (Netemeyer, et.al, 1995).

The research thus provides an understanding of the rising consumerist tendencies of the youngsters in India who are driven by the need to measure self-esteem through the prism of others views about them in platforms like social media. As the self-worth is to be drawn from social and exchange of information-oriented platforms, organizations with a target product base for youngsters would find it lucrative to capture space in the social media and exhibit the right ingredients boosting the self-esteem of such youngsters.

The study also has significance for policy level decision on the usage of social media. Easy access and uninhibited self-presentation might be a hindrance for Indian youth's holistic participation in the social process and create a consumerist environment where excessive self-awareness and self-presentation might rule.

It also might not be a healthy way towards creating a self-identity. The findings from the study can help policy makers in creating guidelines for the use of social media for a susceptible group of users who do not follow socially chartered norms for the usage of social media. The paper empirically validates the social implication of social media on a vulnerable section (the youngsters)

in a developing nation which lacks strict legal adherence and is marked by absence of social norms for regulation in the use of social media.

Limitations

The current study was conducted as an experimental research on a group of 40 students studying in postgraduate MBA programme. The experimental nature of the research was a restricting factor in getting a larger sample size. Given the results of the study, there is an opportunity to explore the generalizability of the constructs across a larger group of sample. Since male and female students were not comparable in their representation in number, drawing generalizable conclusions on gender and vanity post social media usage was not possible. Further studies can be done to address this area. The generally observed phenomenon of female's orientation to beauty being higher than males can be re-examined by using the scale for a suitable sample population.

Likewise, the average age of the current sample was 23 years. This rendered the conclusions non-generalizable for all age group. There is a scope to conduct a study for young executives in organizations. These groups have high orientation towards social media usage and belong to the socio-economic stratum which allows them the luxury of high disposable income. Equipped with the material resources, it would be insightful to assess the ways through which social media usage impacts the self-worth of individuals in this age and social section.

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