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Traits, Emotional-Behavioral Issues and Technology: How Demographics Shapes Adolescent's Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The current research investigated the predictive nature of the demographic factors such as age, gender, and class level on the narcissistic personality traits, emotional and behavioral issues, and the use of social media among adolescents. A cross-sectional, quantitative study design was employed and 239 students (13-19 years old) studying in the 9th and 10th grade in schools in Jhelum were used to collect the data. There was an administration of standardized measures, such as narcissism subscale, the Emotional and Behavioral Problems Scale (EBPS), and the Social Media Disorder (SMD) scale. The neural network analysis showed that the strongest predictors of emotional and behavioral issues and narcissism were gender and the class level, respectively, and age, in turn. The results have demonstrated the developmental and sociocultural roles of demographics in determining the psychological functioning and digital interactions of adolescents. The paper can add to the existing a mass of literature by providing evidence based on a Pakistani school setting and highlighting the necessity of gender sensitive mental health interventions and grade specific digital literacy programs.



Introduction

There are number of psychological construct that has a strong demographic influence. The current study investigated the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, and class level on the narcissistic personality traits, emotional and behavioral issues, and the use of social media among adolescents. Let's consider the construct first.

Narcissistic Personality

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), NPD is characterized by a grandiosity (in either behavior or fantasy), a sense of admiration, and lack of empathy, which start in early adulthood. According to Ames, Rose, and Anderson (2006), the narcissistic personality gauges characteristics including entitlement, conceit, and superiority, may be used to operationalize Narcissistic Personality. Further, it may be defined as the grandiose and vulnerable aspects of narcissism and assesses emotional sensitivity and self-grandiosity (Pincus et al., 2009).

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) posits that some of the characteristics of narcissism include fascination with the importance of self, requiring compliments, and is sensitive to criticism. Excessive self-focus can result in maladaptive behaviors, even if certain narcissistic features, such the need for autonomy and recognition, are normal during adolescence (Barry & Wallace, 2010). The studies reveal that those teenagers who have higher narcissism scores are more prone to self-promotional behaviors (McCain & Campbell, 2018). People may create and manage their public persona on social media, which makes it the perfect setting for narcissistic expression (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008).

Emotional-Behavioral Problems

The Goodman (1997), defined emotional and behavioral disorders as patterns of emotional discomfort and behavioral challenges that interfere with normal functioning. Achenbach and Rescorla (2001), state that the emotional and behavioral disorders include internalizing (depression, anxiety) and externalizing (aggression, conduct difficulties) behaviors. Further, Sette, and Colleagues (2016), define emotional and behavioral disorders as challenges in emotion regulation and social competence that result in maladaptive behavior.

Adolescence is a very important period when identity is to be developed and emotional stability is to be achieved (Twenge & Campbell, 2010). Depression, anxiety, impatience, and violence are among the symptoms that adolescents in emotional distress frequently display (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). According to Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020), the growing digitization of communication has increased exposure to social rejection, online comparison, and cyberbullying—all of which are risk factors for emotional issues.

Research has further revealed that those adolescents with poor emotion regulation can be characterized as externalizing such as defiant or impulsive behavior (Sette, et al., 2016).

As untreated emotional dysregulation may lead to mental health challenges in the adulthood, it is crucial to diagnose these disorders at the earliest possible (World Health Organization, 2021).

Social media

The rise of social media has altered the social and emotional landscape of the adolescent phase as it has altered the way young people express themselves, communicate and seek validation. Adolescence is a crucial time for psychological and emotional growth, and as such, it is extremely vulnerable to social criticism from outside sources, especially online (Twenge & Campbell, 2010).

Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013), defined social media usage as the behavioral and emotional integration of social media in day-to-day living. Social media has now become the highlight in teenagers' social lives and the construction of identity in today's digital age. Social media usage was described by Kuss and Griffiths (2017), as the quantity and kind of actions carried out on platforms, which may indicate patterns of passive or addicted participation.

Teens could share information about their life, seek validation, and compare with others on social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. They are usually shaped by frequent exposure to shape their emotional maturity as well as their self-concept. According to research, teenagers who spend excessive time online tend to become narcissistic, unstable, and have behavioral issues (Twenge & Campbell, 2010).

Social media has become a significant part of the teenage life as it influences the social interaction, emotional development, and identity formation. Adolescence is a crucial time for self-discovery during which people look to their peers for approval and a sense of belonging (Erikson, 1968).

According to research, social media can make people more susceptible to peer pressure and social comparison even while it also improves communication skills and social capital (Best, et al., 2014).

The constant bombardment of idealized images and digital popularity ideals may cause teenagers to start identifying their value with digital attention to the point of emotionally destabilizing and becoming confused with their identity (Twenge & Campbell, 2010).

Demographics Predictors

Emotional and behavioral Problems

Age, gender and class are the demographic factors that define emotional and behavioral problems (EBPs) in adolescents. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that externalization (e.g., aggression, hyperactivity) and internalization (e.g., anxiety, depression) problems are more likely to be seen in earlier and later problems in childhood and adolescence, respectively, as developmental, social, and educational pressures are experienced (Babicka-Wirkus et al., 2023). These trends indicate the necessity to keep the developmental and gender-specific peculiarities in mind when evaluating the psychological challenges in young people.

Narcissistic traits

Research has consistently shown that **age** is a significant predictor of narcissistic traits. A large study across more than a quarter million individuals found that narcissism tends to peak in young adulthood and declines thereafter, with a modest but consistent negative correlation between age and narcissistic traits (Weidmann et al., 2023). This suggests that in adolescence — when many students are in middle- to high-school grades — narcissistic traits may be relatively elevated compared to later life. Moreover, distinctions in how different measures of narcissism (e.g., grandiose vs vulnerable; agentic vs antagonistic) change with age suggest that developmental trajectories for various facets of narcissism are heterogeneous (Weidmann et al., 2023).

Even gender differences are strong: men or boys are more likely to have higher scores on narcissism compared to women or girls (Weidmann et al., 2023). This can be very easily transferred into more forms of grandiosity, entitlement and exploitativeness in males in youth samples (e.g., in bullying research).

Other previous studies that had sampled students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 had found no significant effects of narcissism changes across early to late adolescence, although omnipotence or invulnerability facets were differently related to adjustment and risk-behaviors (Aalsma, et al., 2006).

Social media use

The use of social media among the adolescents grows with age especially between 13-16 years that are the ages of class 9 and 10. According to Booker, Kelly, and Sacker (2018), the amount of time spent online and the degree of online interaction with peers increase consistently in the early-to-mid-adolescence stage, with older adolescents spending more time on social networks and becoming increasingly active online. Research that concentrates on secondary-school students suggests that a moderate social media usage may facilitate academic experiences, which enables students to share notes, correct ideas, and cooperate with their peers (Abuzar & Hussain, 2024). Nevertheless, excessive or delayed social media consumption has been associated with poor sleep quality and low concentration during the day, both of which have adverse effects on the academic success of learners in these grades (Anjum et al., 2024).

The issue of gender is also a determinant in influencing the use of social media by adolescents and its impact on them. It has been proven that girls use social networking sites to interact more and more emotionally than boys do, which can expose them to other risks like social comparison and cyberbullying (Booker et al., 2018). In the Pakistani setting, Riaz and Mudassar (2019) reported that girls tend to use social media to construct relationships and express themselves, and boys tend to use social media to be entertained and expanded further. Such gendered distinctions have not only tended to affect tendencies in online interaction, but also the lives of students in terms of well-being and academic concentration. This applies to the students of class 9 and 10, which implies that boys and girls can get different benefits and experience various vulnerabilities when using social media, which is why it is essential to introduce gender-sensitive digital literacy and instructions at school.

Rationale of the Study

1. Limited studies have been conducted in Pakistan on how age, gender, and class grade can affect narcissistic, emotional, and behavioral issues and social media use among adolescents.
2. Adolescents are a delicate population, and the emotional and personality formation of this group might be influenced by the demographic factors differently.
3. The demographic groups with high risks can be identified and this will aid in early identification of emotional, behavioral, or personality related issues.

Objective of the Study

To investigate which demographics variables significantly important in predicting the narcissistic traits, emotional and behavioral problem and social media among adolescents

Methodology

Research design

The study was employ a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the role of demographics in narcissistic personality traits, emotional and behavioral problems and social media use among adolescents.

Setting of the study

The study was take place in schools in Jhelum which were take information physically which was provide a relevant environment for data collection and participant engagement.

Sample

The target population were consisting of adolescents 13-19 year age range people in a specific program ensuring that the findings was applicable to this demographic.

Sampling technique

The target population was used to select a sample of 239 subjects and have a representative and meaningful analysis of the data.

Inclusion/ Exclusion criteria:

The inclusion criteria were consisting of 13-19 range of peoples both male and female were including in the study, 9th and 10th students are currently enrolled in schools were involved. While the exclusion criteria were eliminating participant who have medical conditions or disability that may impact participation, were excluded from the study.

Tools/instruments

Tools of the current study were included with 5 parts which are consent form, demographics variable, Narcissism subscale, Emotional and behavioral problems scale and Social Media Disorder scale.

Narcissism Scale

The Short dark triad scale; Narcissism subscale, (Jones, & Paulhus, 2014), was used in the study. The subscale of narcissism had a total of 9 items and was scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An interpretation of the Narcissism is high score of narcissism subscales indicates higher narcissistic traits. The Narcissism included a Cronbach's alpha for reliability of .77.

Social Media Disorder Scale

The Social media Disorder (SMD) Scale, (Van den Eijnden et al., 2016), was used in the study. The scale had a 9 items and was scored on a 2 points; yes/No format. Higher scores indicates higher levels of addictive social media use. A score of 5 or more is often indicator of social media use according to DSM. The SMD scale included a Cronbach's alpha for reliability is .80 to .86.

Emotional and Behavioral Problem scale

The Emotional and Behavioral Problem scale (EBPS), (Kausar et al., 2022), was used in the study. The scale had 32 items was scored on a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. An interpretation of EBPS scores ranged from 32-96 is mild emotional and behavioral problems, 97-128 indicates moderate emotional and behavioral problems and 129-160 indicates higher emotional and behavioral problems. The EBPS scale included a Cronbach's alpha for reliability is .92.

Procedure

The study has used a non-probability convenient sampling method to recruit teenagers in various grades of classes. The sample included students aged 13 to 19 years who were studying in schools routinely and could read and comprehend the questionnaires. The participants were made aware of the objectives, nature and needs of the research beforehand. The study participants gave informed consent and the school administration was also given the consent.

The participants were assured that all information they would give was confidential and anonymous and also they were told that they were participating due to their own choice and that they could pull out at any time without any consequences. To make the students feel relaxed and free to provide information, the researcher initially built rapport with the students and gave them very clear guidelines on how to answer the questionnaires.

Once the rapport building was completed, the students were requested to determine the following measures: Short Dark Triad Narcissism Subscale, Behavioral Problems Scale (32-item; Kausar et al.), Social Media Disorder Scale (SMD) and Demographic information sheet (age, gender, and grade in class)

The questionnaires were completed by the respondents in a classroom where the researcher was present to provide clarifications on any questions. Researcher also take information from respected authors. After all the steps were made, the students were given thanks on their time, cooperation and participation in the study.

Statistical Analysis

The formal data analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25. Descriptive frequencies was used to analyze the demographics information. A neural network analysis was used to check the normalized importance of demographics (Age, gender and class) constructs on narcissistic traits, emotional and behavioral problem and social media among medical students.

Results

The present study aimed to determine which normalized importance of demographic variables on narcissistic traits, emotional and behavioral problem and social media among adolescents. For this purpose, neural network analysis was used. The analysis provides the relative error of testing and training and normalized importance of each demographic variable on Narcissistic traits, emotional and behavioral problem and social media among adolescents.

The demographics analysis suggests that of the 239 students more were male students in the study with the ages between 13-19 years. The students were registered in 9th and 10th class.

Table 1: Relative error for training and testing of Narcissistic traits.

	Relative Error
Training	.996
Testing	.988

If the relative errors of testing (.996) and training (.988) were small, the predictive relationship between the demographics and Narcissistic traits were established.

Table 2: Demographics Variables Normalized importance of Predicting Narcissistic Traits

Demographic variables	Importance	Normalize Importance
Age	.121	21.1%
Gender	.574	100.0%
Class	.304	53.0%

Table 2 indicates the normalized importance of different demographic constructs in foreseeing Narcissistic traits among adolescents. The findings confirmed that Gender was the most significant

predictor of narcissistic traits normalized importance (100%) followed by class (53.0%) and Age (21.1%). Generally, the demographic construct mutually explained the variations in emotional and behavioral problem, but the normalized importance diverges noticeably.

Table 3: Relative error for training and testing of emotional and behavioral problem

	Relative Error
Training	1.005
Testing	1.001

If the relative errors of testing (1.001) and training (1.005) were small, the predictive relationship between the demographics and emotional and behavioral problem were established.

Table 4: Demographics Variables Normalized importance of Predicting Emotional and Behavioral Problem

Demographics Variables	Importance	Normalized Importance
Age	.213	46.0%
Gender	.463	100.0%
Class	.323	69.8%

Table 4 indicates the normalized importance of different demographic constructs in foreseeing emotional and behavioral problem among adolescents. The findings confirmed that Gender was the most significant predictor of emotional and behavioral problem (normalized importance 100%) followed by class (69.8%) and Age (46.0%). Generally, the demographic construct mutually explained the variations in emotional and behavioral problem, but the normalized importance diverges noticeably.

Table 5: Relative error for training and testing of Social Media Use

	Relative Error
Training	1.012
Testing	1.003

Interpretation: If the relative errors of testing (1.012) and training (1.003) were small, the predictive relationship between the demographics and Social media Use were established.

Table 6: Demographics Variables Normalized importance of Predicting Social Media.

Demographic variables	Importance	Normalized Importance
Age	.391	98.1%
Gender	.211	53.0%
Class	.398	100.0%

Interpretation: Table 6 indicates the normalized importance of different demographic constructs in foreseeing Social media use among adolescents. The findings confirmed that class was the most significant predictor of Social media use (normalized importance 100%) followed by Age (98.1%) and Gender (53.0%). Generally, the demographic construct mutually explained the variations in Social media use, but the normalized importance diverges noticeably.

Discussion

The current research was supposed to identify which demographic factors such as age, gender and class are significant predictors of narcissistic behavior, emotional and behavioral issues and use of social media among adolescents. Based on a sample of 239 students between the ages of 13-19 years, who were enrolled in the 9th and 10th grade, the study used a neural network analysis to investigate predictive patterns of these variables. This demographic group is appropriate to be selected according to the developmental literature, which stresses that adolescence is a vulnerable stage when people are more vulnerable to emotions, develop their identities, and use digital technologies more often (Twenge & Campbell, 2010). The research was aimed at filling a gap in the body of research by studying demographic predictors since research in this field is still scarce particularly in the Pakistani school environment.

The results showed that gender turned out to be the most important predictor of both emotional and behavioral issues and narcissist characteristics. Gender had the greatest normalized importance (100) on emotional and behavioral problems, with class (69.8) and age (46.0) coming later. Such findings coincide with the existing body of literature that demonstrates that girls tend to internalize their problems, such as anxiety and depression more often, whereas boys tend to externalize their problems, including being aggressive and impulsive (Sappenfield et al., 2024; Babicka-Wirkus et al., 2023). Also, gender was the most essential predictor of narcissistic characteristics (100%), which is aligned with the findings of the research showing that boys tend to be more grandiose, entitled, and self-enhancing (Weidmann et al., 2023). These patterns of gender support some of the previous theoretical assertions suggesting that both narcissistic expression and emotional reactivity are different in males and females in their adolescent stages (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The strongest predictor, in the example of social media use, was the class (100%), then there was the age (98.1%), and the gender had a moderate predictive value (53%). It implies that the more students advance in their academic level (between 9th and 10th grade, which is a significant transition phase with more academic pressure, communication with peers, and identity development), the more they use social media. This result supports previous research, which mentions a gradual increase in the use of social media in the period of early to mid-adolescence, with older pupils becoming more socially autonomous and digitally engaged (Booker et al., 2018). The moderate impact of gender is echoed by the results that girls tend to use social media to form an emotional bond with boys tend to use it as a source of entertainment (Riaz & Mudassar, 2019), and the involvement of both genders does not differ.

Conclusion

The current research established that demographic variables, namely, gender, classes, and age play a significant role in the prediction of narcissistic traits, emotional and behavioral issues, and the use of social media among adolescents. The most crucial predictors of psychological outcomes were gender and followed by, class and age. These findings highlight the importance of focusing on gender-responsive mental health initiatives, class-specific trainings on digital literacy, and early measures that would refer to emotional regulation and healthy online behavioral patterns. Awareness of the potential influence of demographic variables on the outcomes of psychological and digital processes can be used to assist educators, parents, and mental health experts in formulating specific strategies to help teenagers remain well in the digital era.

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